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2016 PREVIEW

SEC

AROUND THE SEC

FROM HERO TO HOT SEAT

THE TIDE'S SECRET WEAPON

SEC'S QB *QUANDARY*

INSIDE

THE ALABAMA *DYNASTY*

TOP COLLEGE TOWNS

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Elementary, Watson

The task in 2016 is simple for Deshaun Watson and the Clemson Tigers. After an Orange Bowl CFP Semifinal win and a near miss in the Championship vs. Alabama, plus a third-place Heisman finish for the electrifying orange-clad signal caller, Watson and his cohorts intend to bring both big trophies back to Clemson this season.

Tom DiPace

Athlon Sports COLLEGE FOOTBALL Throwback Covers

REVISITING OUR 2006 AND 2011 ANNUALS

2006

2011

Athlon has produced some vivid, eye-catching West Virginia covers over the years, but we may have outdone ourselves a decade ago with a memorable combination of star power, color and creativity. The Steve Slaton-Pat White era in Morgantown represented a peak in West Virginia football history, and we were equal to the challenge of capturing it in cover form, if we do say so ourselves. The Mountaineers fell short of their championship goals, finishing 11–2, but that didn't diminish the Slaton-White legacy, and we wouldn't be surprised if our 2006 cover were still adorning walls in homes across the Mountain State.

Five years ago, the Alabama Crimson Tide were coming off a three-loss season. Clearly embarrassed by this lackluster showing, Nick Saban and the Tide went back to work and haven't lost as many as three games in a season since.

That year, as the cover says, the Tide turned to Trent Richardson, and the bruising back responded with 1,679 rushing yards and 24 total touchdowns to deliver Saban his third BCS Championship and second at Alabama. Saban would add another in 2012 and a Playoff title in 2015. In other words, it's been high Tide ever since.

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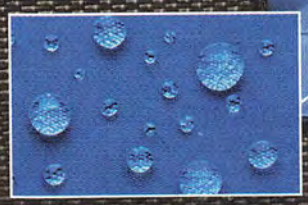

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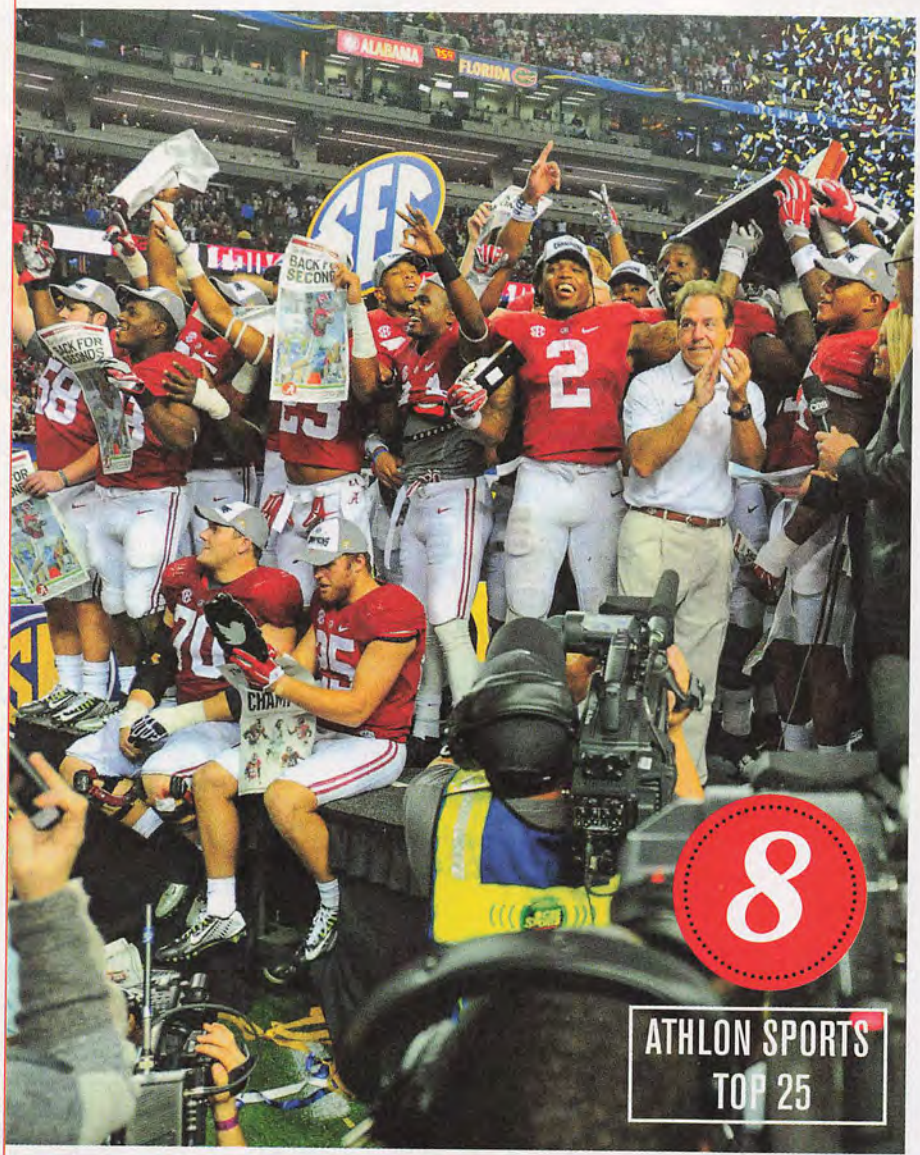

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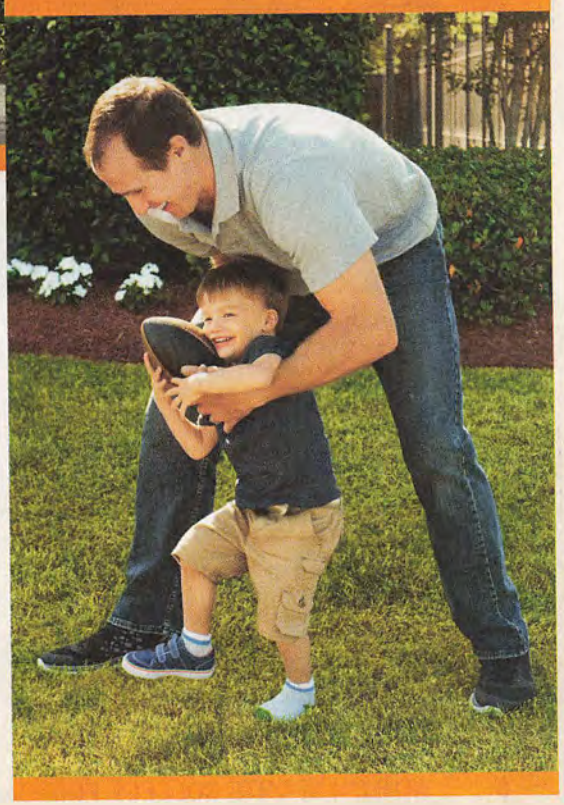

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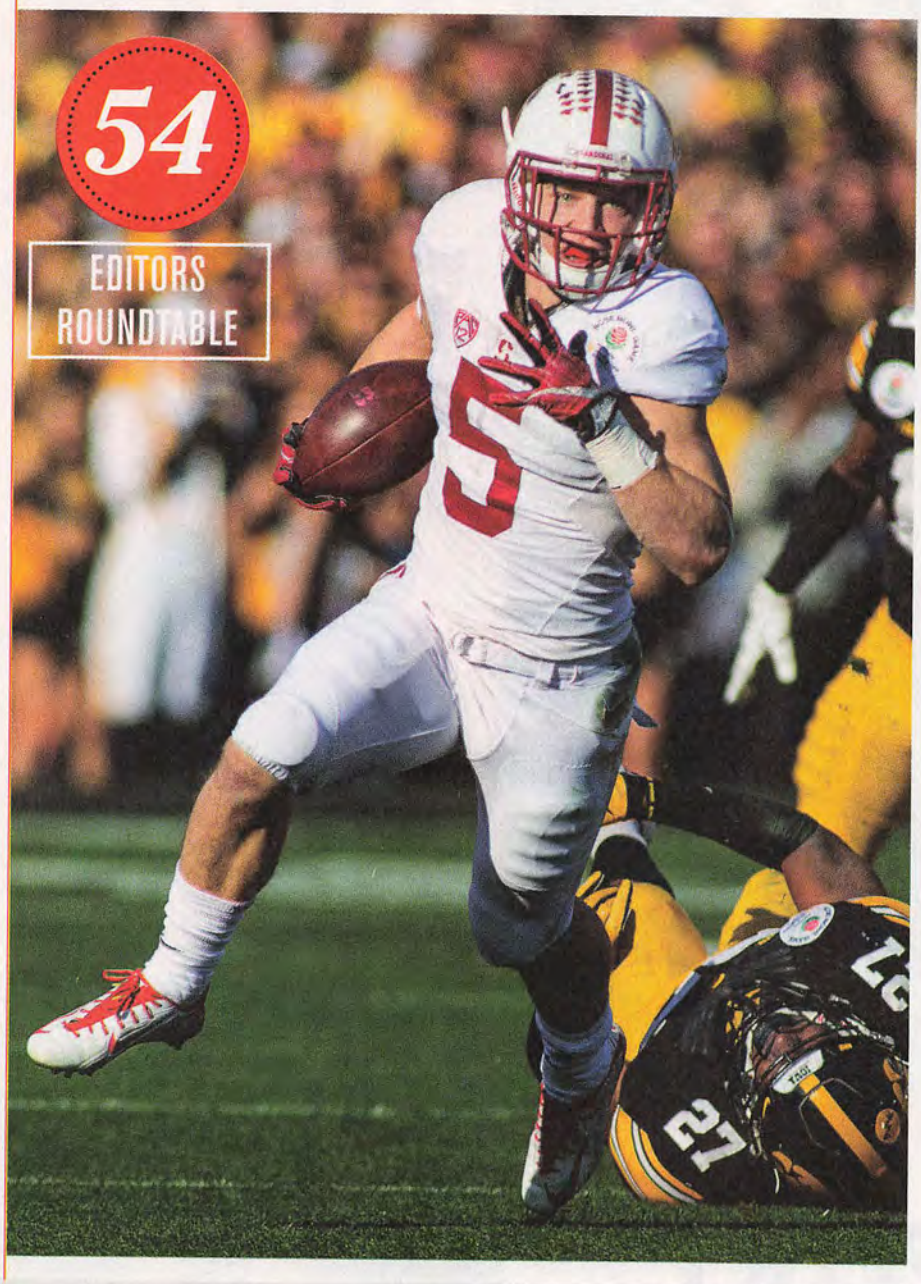

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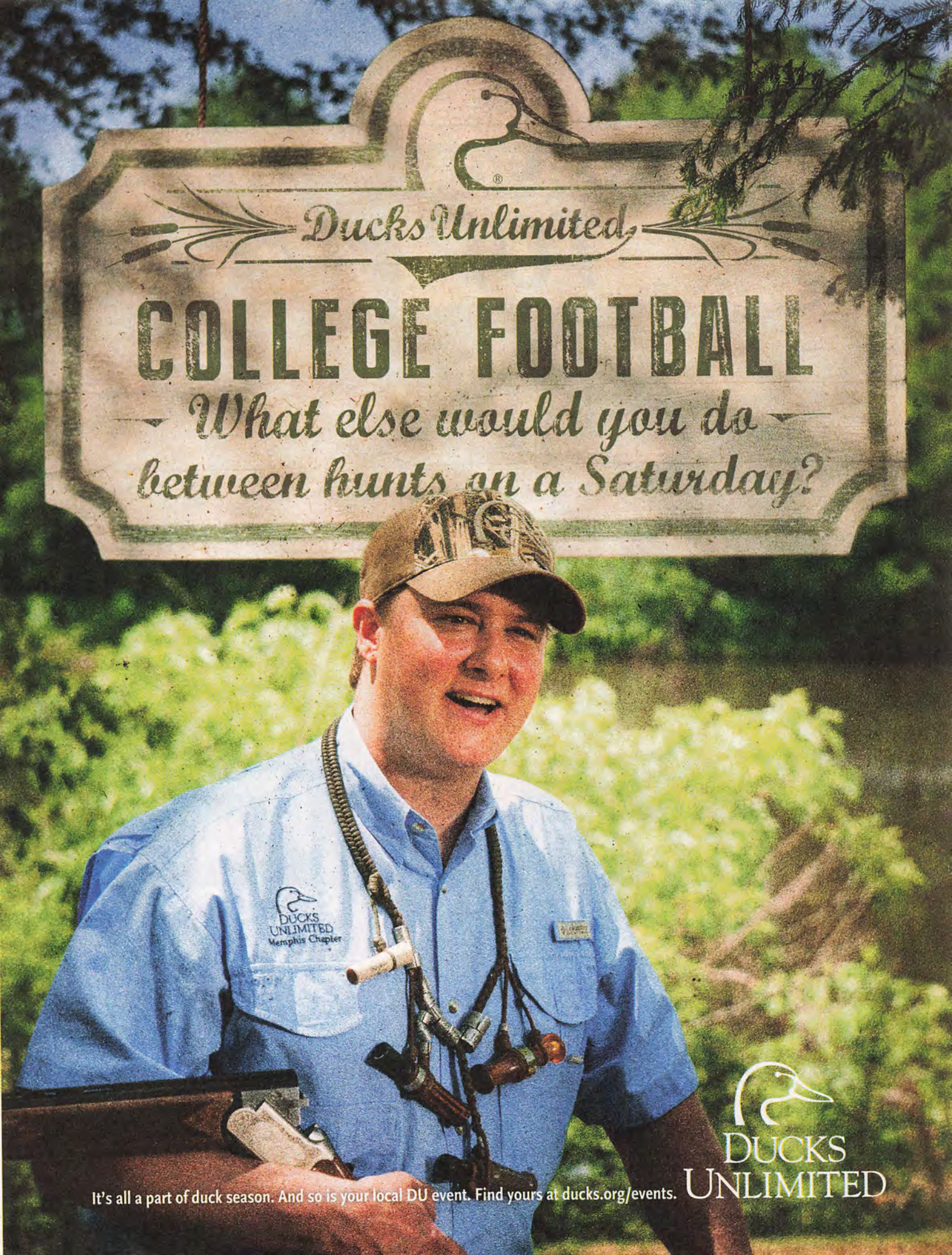
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ATHLON SPORTS PRESEASON TOP 25

1 ALABAMA
CRIMSON TIDE

This is not the way college football is supposed to work. Even great programs see their fates change over time. Players come and go. Notable assistants get head coaching jobs. Key recruits don't pan out. Complacency sets in. Competition gets better. All of this seemed to be true when Alabama fell behind by 20 points late in the third quarter to Ole Miss on the way to a 43–37 loss on Sept. 19. The season ended, though, with Alabama handing No. 1 Clemson its only loss of the season for the Tide's fourth national championship in the last seven years.

Alabama has proven to be the exception for power programs, even among the all-time best. Most remarkable, Alabama has shown no let-up during this run that started eight years ago. Only once since 2008 has Alabama not been in the national championship race entering Thanksgiving weekend — and in that season in 2010, Alabama still won 10 games and finished in the top 10.

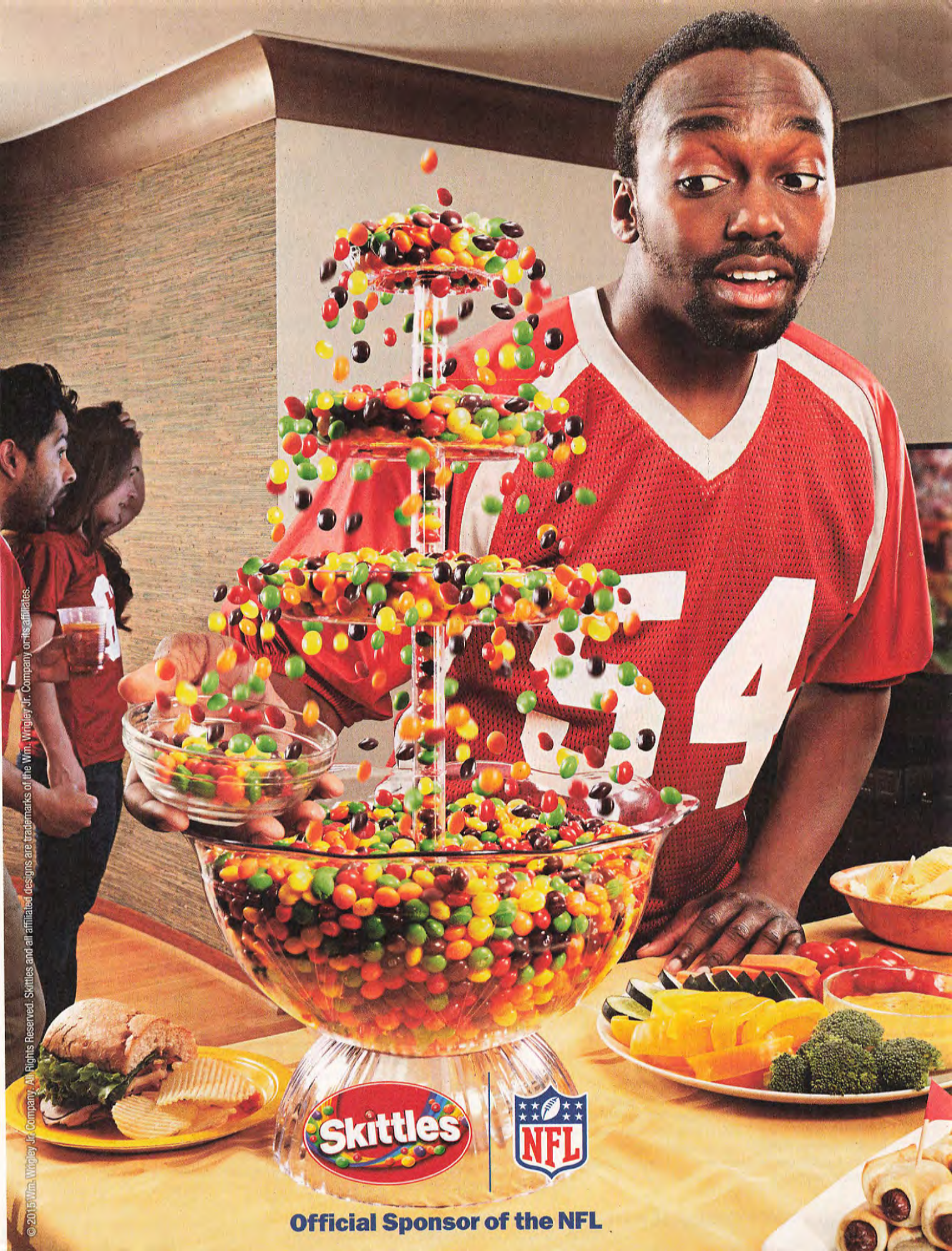
For most teams, losing a Heisman Trophy winner, a starting quarterback and seven key players from the front seven would be the sign of a rebuilding year. For Alabama, it's just a question of who becomes the next superstar and the next pro prospect.

The Tide's next quarterback, whether it's Cooper Bateman, David Cornwell or Blake Barnett, has a stud receiver (Calvin Ridley) and steady left tackle (Cam Robinson) by his side. Running back Bo Scarbrough steps into the shoes of Derrick Henry.

And Alabama's front seven still includes the team's sack leader (Jonathan Allen), second-leading tackler (Reuben Foster) and a handful of elite talent that played behind potential first-round picks a year ago. The recruit-and-replace system has become near-automatic in Tuscaloosa, making Alabama our preseason No. 1 team.

The names change. The results do not.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports



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2 FLORIDA STATE SEMINOLES

Say this for what Jimbo Fisher has built at Florida State: A 10-win season has become routine. The Seminoles have won at least 10 games in all but one of Fisher's six seasons. But 2015 was also the first time in three seasons Florida State wasn't a national championship contender and the first time in four years the Seminoles didn't win the ACC. Florida State is still in its usual spot in the national elite, but the question is this: Will the Seminoles be national championship good? After losing three times in the first post-Jameis Winston season, Florida State may be ready to reclaim its spot atop the ACC. In a year in which running backs took center stage, we almost had to be reminded how good Florida State's Dalvin Cook was in 2015. Cook returns and should be as explosive as ever, and the defense — even without star corner/safety Jalen Ramsey — will remain elite thanks to talent up front. Quarterback is the only position on offense where FSU doesn't have a full-time returning starter. Redshirt senior Sean Maguire started five games, but a youth movement is afoot to unseat him. The outcome of that position battle may determine if Florida State is good — or great.

J.T. BARRETT

3 OHIO STATE BUCKEYES

Urban Meyer may have learned an important lesson last season: There is such a thing as too much talent. In trying to repeat as national champions, Ohio State never seemed to put the right players in the right places at the right time. Cardale Jones was the top quarterback ... just not in the red zone ... until he was benched. Braxton Miller transitioned from quarterback to wide receiver to bystander. Running back Ezekiel Elliott was conspicuously absent in Ohio State's only loss of the season, a defeat that cost the Buckeyes the division, a shot at the conference championship and a spot in the College Football Playoff.

"Less is more" will have to be a theme this season. The offense will have an opportunity to coalesce around J.T. Barrett, as it did when he was the first-team All-Big Ten quarterback as a freshman in 2014. This isn't to say Ohio State is without talent. This is a Buckeyes team under Meyer, after all. Lineman Pat Elflein, linebacker Raekwon McMillan and defensive end Tyquan Lewis are the new headliners of a program that has brought in six consecutive top-10 signing classes. It just might be a team where the pieces — and egos — fit more naturally.

FLORIDA STATE

4 CLEMSON TIGERS

Last season may have been The Year of Dabo, at least the 2015 portion of it. Dabo Swinney's postgame interviews became the stuff of legend, highlighted by his BYOG — Bring Your Own Guts — rant after the Tigers' thrilling win over Notre Dame. And when the 13–0 regular season ended, Swinney delivered on a promise of a pizza party for 30,000 fans at Memorial Stadium. We should point out that Clemson also has won 56 games in five seasons, shedding the reputation of a program that shrinks in the spotlight.

The 2016 season could be The Year of Deshaun. The spotlight certainly isn't too big for Clemson's returning quarterback, who figures to be a top Heisman Trophy candidate. Coming off a serious knee injury, Watson was solid throughout the entire 2015 season, but he really hit his stride in November. By the time Clemson faced Alabama in the national title game, Watson looked the part of Vince Young circa 2005. A healthy Watson will have seven other returning starters around him, including running back Wayne Gallman, receiver Artavis Scott and three linemen. The defense has some reloading to do, but the Tigers have ranked in the top 25 nationally in total defense for three straight years. Clemson's window to win big is still wide open.

5 MICHIGAN WOLVERINES

No coach dominated the offseason news cycle quite like Jim Harbaugh. The second-year Wolverines coach climbed a tree to impress a recruit, went to World Religions class with a recruit and slept over at another prospect's house. He turned National Signing Day into an NFL Draft-meets-the-Oscars kind of spectacle, highlighted by appearances from Tom Brady and Derek Jeter. He also sparred with the SEC and the Ohio State athletic director.

All of this would be funnier to rival programs if Harbaugh didn't dominate the news cycle during the season, too. Michigan enjoyed its best season since 2011 in Harbaugh's first season at his alma mater, and the momentum should continue. The Wolverines replaced defensive coordinator D.J. Durkin, who took the Maryland job, with one of the best hires of the offseason in Don Brown. Led by do-everything junior Jabrill Peppers, the Michigan defense should be among the league's best. On offense, Harbaugh will try to work his quarterback magic with another transfer in John O'Korn, the favorite among a host of candidates.

It's only a matter of time before Harbaugh delivers a Big Ten title — or more — to the folks in Ann Arbor.

Florida State: Tom DiPace; Ohio State: Ric Fogel

It's just bread until you taste it.

JOE MIXON

6 OKLAHOMA SOONERS

Last year's Oklahoma team might not have been Bob Stoops' best in Norman, but it did have one thing in common with the 2000 squad that won the national championship: The Sooners started to surprise people again. Baylor and TCU entered the 2015 season appearing to lead the way in a new-look Big 12, but the Sooners proved the old guard still has some fight. Since 2008, OU has had a tough time consistently matching the production of Stoops' first nine seasons. The 2014 season was the nadir, as the Sooners finished 8–5 with a 40–6 loss to Clemson (with a backup quarterback) in the Russell Athletic Bowl.

That set the stage for the rebuilding that will continue to bear fruit in 2016. Quarterback Baker Mayfield, who just three years ago was a walk-on quarterback at Texas Tech, returns motivated by his distant fourth-place finish in the Heisman race. Oklahoma enters 2016 as a favorite, a role that has not served the Sooners well recently. If the motto for 2016 is unfinished business, the Sooners will look no further than the matchup with Texas, which handed OU one of the most bizarre defeats of the season — and the series — last October.

7 TENNESSEE VOLUNTEERS

Tennessee fans can all say it together: This is the year. This is the season the Volunteers retake their rightful place among the SEC elite. Butch Jones has led Tennessee to a two-game improvement in each of his three seasons, from five wins, to seven, to nine. Tennessee fans expect that trend to continue. Eleven wins probably means the Volunteers' first trip to the SEC Championship Game since 2007 and their first win over Florida since 2004. These are lofty goals, but ones Tennessee can reach. Nine starters return on each side of the ball. That includes the starting backfield of Josh Dobbs and Jalen Hurd and four offensive linemen. On defense, that means SEC Defensive Player of the Year contenders Derek Barnett and Jalen Reeves-Maybin. The Volunteers will need to find a way to turn close losses into wins — their defeats to Oklahoma, Florida, Arkansas and Alabama were by an average of 4.3 points. Tennessee will have to figure that out fast, as the Vols' schedule is front-loaded with Virginia Tech, Florida, Georgia, Texas A&M and Alabama all by Oct. 15. If all goes to plan, Tennessee could have the SEC East all but wrapped up by November. And that's something worth waiting for.

8 NOTRE DAME FIGHTING IRISH

After the last three seasons, Notre Dame has to wonder when good fortune will start to swing back in favor of the Irish. Since arriving ahead of schedule and appearing in the 2012 national title game, Notre Dame has been beset by injuries and academic casualties. To the credit of the Irish, the program weathered injuries — most notably to quarterback Malik Zaire — to win 10 games last season. Notre Dame's only two regular-season losses, to Clemson and Stanford, came by two points apiece.

Brian Kelly now has a problem with which only Urban Meyer can sympathize: Having two quarterbacks who can win at a high level. Zaire and DeShone Kizer are both fully capable, but neither will have the luxury of playing with first-round offensive tackle Ronnie Stanley and deep threat Will Fuller. No matter who plays quarterback, the defense will need to improve from a disappointing 2015 season — the Irish allowed 5.6 yards per play, tied for 64th nationally — and it will have to do it without standouts Jaylon Smith, Sheldon Day and KeiVarae Russell. Now, that will take some luck.

LEONARD FOURNETTE

9 LSU TIGERS

Last fall, athletic director Joe Alleva was content to let chatter continue about the future of Les Miles as the Tigers endured their first three-game losing streak since 1999. Only after LSU beat Texas A&M on the last day of the regular season did Alleva throw his support behind Miles. Those who believe Miles is underachieving can make a strong argument: The Tigers continue to recruit at any elite level yet have a rather ordinary — by LSU's standards — 14–10 record in the SEC in the last three seasons.

The 2016 season sets up as a crossroads. The Tigers' trademark defense took a step back last season, but it returns 10 starters and add highly regarded coordinator Dave Aranda from Wisconsin. The question, as usual, is the offense. Putting almost all of it on Leonard Fournette's shoulders was a perfectly fine strategy until the Alabama game — when the Tigers were outgained 434 to 182 in a 30–16 loss. LSU's fate may depend on the development of quarterback Brandon Harris, who did show improvement as the season progressed. If Fournette is a one-man show and the defense doesn't take a step forward, Miles may find himself testing the waters — and grass — in a new locale.

Oklahoma: Patrick Murphy-Racey; LSU, Ole Miss: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports; Michigan State: Tom Lynn

AKEEM JUDD

10 OLE MISS *REBELS*

Ole Miss fans have to feel a bit conflicted. The Rebels have rarely been better. They've finished the last two seasons in the top 20 and spent part of the last two seasons in the top five. They're the only team to beat Alabama in the regular season the last two years, and they've done it twice. But last season could have been better. The Rebels' defense was ravaged by injuries, contributing to losses to Florida and Memphis. A wild lateral in overtime and a two-point conversion cost the Rebels a win against Arkansas. Win that game, and it's Ole Miss — not Alabama — that meets Florida in the SEC Championship Game.

Take heart, Ole Miss fans. The window hasn't closed. For the first time since — ever? — Ole Miss was hit hard by early entries to the NFL Draft, but Hugh Freeze, who brought in his second top-10 signing class in four years, has plenty of talent to remain relevant in the SEC West. Quarterback Chad Kelly returns after a record-setting year, and he should have a dangerous supporting cast. Some of the star power is gone from the Landshark defense, but five returning starters should keep the Rebels very strong on that side of the ball.

11 WASHINGTON *HUSKIES*

It's been 16 years since Washington's last conference championship and an additional nine years since the Huskies won their only national title. An entire generation might not believe that there was a time that Washington — not Stanford, Oregon or USC — was the premier program out West. Since Washington's 2000 Rose Bowl season, the Huskies have had five coaches. One coach went 1–10 in his final season. Another went 0–12. At one point, Washington went seven years without going to a bowl game.

The Huskies, however, appear to be on the verge of returning to relevance, both in the league and nationally. Washington returns 17 starters from a young team that made easy work of the lesser opponents in 2015 and held its own in most of its losses. The Huskies clobbered rival Washington State (ranked No. 20 at the time), beat USC 17–12 on the road and lost one-score games to Boise State, Cal and Oregon.

Third-year coach Chris Petersen has had to rebuild the program from scratch and has suffered as many losses in 27 games at Washington (12) as he did in 104 games at Boise State. Now the fruits of that rebuilding job should start to show, and Washington's glory days won't seem so distant.

12 STANFORD *CARDINAL*

The Cardinal finished 8–5 in 2014, and the clock on the program's reign as a national power seemed to be ticking. In 2015, Stanford's momentum changed as quickly as Christian McCaffrey could flip a field. The Cardinal shook off a season-opening loss to Northwestern and rounded into form as a College Football Playoff contender. A two-point loss to Oregon on Nov. 14 prevented Stanford from earning that coveted postseason spot, but Stanford often looked like one of the four best teams in the country.

McCaffrey is back to make another run at the Heisman Trophy; the electrifying running back represented Stanford's fourth No. 2 finish for the award in the last seven years. The defense wasn't as dominant as in previous seasons, so that side of the ball will need to return to form if Stanford is going to emerge as a legit CFB Playoff threat. With Kevin Hogan leaving town, Stanford will have questions at quarterback for the first time since 2012 — the first season after Andrew Luck.

This will be a top-25 team again, but the new QB will have to be a quick study against a very difficult schedule.

13 MICHIGAN STATE *SPARTANS*

Michigan State's being overlooked and unappreciated is central to the identity of Mark Dantonio's program. Players' complaints about chips on their shoulders don't quite ring true when Michigan State is competing in the College Football Playoff, winning Big Ten championships, regularly beating Michigan and pulling in top 25 recruiting classes. Then again, no matter how much the Spartans win, they'll continue to get overshadowed with Ohio State and Harbaugh's Michigan sucking up all the oxygen in Big Ten country.

Here's the deal, though: Michigan State was awfully fortunate last year. The Spartans were plus-14 in turnover margin and 6–1 in one-score games, both signs of a team whose record might be better than its actual performance. And then there was that finish against Michigan. The Spartans hope they don't have to rely quite so heavily on fortunate bounces this year. The big question will be on offense, where Dantonio must replace cornerstones Connor Cook, Jack Allen and Jack Conklin.

LJ SCOTT

14 BAYLOR BEARS

Art Briles continues to amaze. Turning Baylor into a national contender is an achievement unto itself, but the final two games of 2015 reinforced what Briles can do when handed a less-than-ideal situation. Down his top two quarterbacks, Briles abandoned his passing game and installed a single-wing attack. It nearly worked against Texas. It was perfected for a 49–38 win over North Carolina in the Russell Athletic Bowl. The offense at Baylor is unimpeachable — and the defense does enough to get by. There's no reason for that to change this season.

Baylor won't have to resort to tricks on offense as quarterbacks Seth Russell and Jarrett Stidham return healthy along with running back Shock Linwood and receiver KD Cannon. Losing Biletnikoff winner Corey Coleman and two-time All-America left tackle Spencer Drango will test Baylor's ability to reload, but the Bears will have time to figure things out. As usual, Baylor will rack up points against its non-conference schedule. The Bears play just one bowl team from 2015 before November (Oklahoma State in Waco on Sept. 24). November will give Briles the stage to shine again.

JOSH ROSEN

15 UCLA BRUINS

Gone are the days when the Bruins should be satisfied with a decent bowl game. Jim Mora has won 37 games in his first four seasons as UCLA's head coach. No other Bruins coach has won more than 29 games in his first four seasons. The Bruins have been ranked in the top 10 for at least a week in each of the last three seasons and reached the Pac-12 title game in the two seasons before that. UCLA also has been one of the more volatile teams in the country; it lost its final two games last season, by 19 to USC and by eight to 6–7 Nebraska in a bowl game.

Sophomore quarterback Josh Rosen looked like a superstar at times last season. Other times he looked star-struck. This is his team now, and there's no reason to believe he won't become one of the best quarterbacks in the country. The Bruins' defense should be strong; they return nine starters, and that doesn't include standout tackle Eddie Vanderdoes, who missed all but one game last season with a knee injury. Four consecutive top-20 recruiting classes — all in the top three in the Pac-12 — have closed the gap between UCLA and the rest of the league. It's time for the Bruins to shine.

GREG WARD JR.

16 HOUSTON COUGARS

Now playing the role of late-aughts Boise State in the College Football Playoff era: the Houston Cougars. Boise State hasn't gone away, but the Cougars could be the first program from outside of the major conferences to make a bid to crash the Playoff. The American Athletic Conference built credibility last year as its top programs knocked off Ole Miss, Penn State and Louisville in the regular season. Houston finished the season with a win over Florida State in the Peach Bowl — a Florida State team wounded by injuries, but a win nonetheless.

The Cougars have one of the game's best up-and-coming coaches in 40-year-old Tom Herman, who was the offensive coordinator for Ohio State's national title team in 2014 and led Houston to 13 wins in his first season as a head coach. Quarterback Greg Ward Jr. is a dual-threat star who accounted for 38 total touchdowns despite battling injuries. He can carry an offense. The defense, on the other hand, will need to replace three impact players in the secondary.

As with those Boise State teams at the end of the BCS era, the margin for error is nil. For any chance at the Playoff, the Cougars will need to beat Oklahoma in the opener and then make easy work of the AAC. Even if all that doesn't happen, Houston could find itself in a major bowl game for the second straight season.

17 GEORGIA BULLDOGS

Kirby Smart has plenty of on-the-job learning to do in his first head coaching gig, but he knows this much: He'll be expected to contend for national championships. Georgia has averaged 9.7 wins per season since Mark Richt was hired in 2001, a run that includes five SEC East titles and two overall SEC titles. Still, the Bulldogs felt they needed a push to become a true title contender. Georgia was *Athlon Sports'* pick to win the SEC East in each of the last three seasons — but Missouri (twice) and Florida went to Atlanta instead. Georgia is tired of leaving things to chance, even if it's reasonable to assume the results would have been different had the Bulldogs' running backs stayed healthy and eligible the last two years.

If Nick Chubb is healthy, he and Sony Michel will form the top backfield duo in the league. Georgia could start a true freshman — top recruit Jacob Eason — at the most important position on the field, though don't count out incumbent Greyson Lambert in the QB derby. A solid defense from last season must rebuild its front seven but should be strong in the secondary. That's a lot of "ifs" for Smart to deal with right away, but he should know that the honeymoon might be exceptionally short.

UCLA: Peter Brouillet; Houston: Houston Athletics; Iowa: Jay Biggerstaff; Louisville: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

18 TCU HORNED FROGS

The Horned Frogs have been nothing if not adaptable in the last two seasons. The first major change came before 2014 when Gary Patterson installed a no-huddle spread attack. The next came throughout the 2015 season when injuries depleted his defense. Young players were forced into emergency duty. Defensive backs became starting linebackers. Still, TCU finished the season with an 11–2 overall record and a 7–2 mark in the tough Big 12.

Patterson's next adaptation will be to replace quarterback Trevone Boykin. The former receiver became one of the most dynamic playmakers in the country as TCU ranked in the top five in total offense in each of the last two seasons. Replacing Boykin will be former Texas A&M quarterback Kenny Hill, who looked like a Heisman contender in September 2014 while leading the Aggies to several lopsided wins. A change of scenery could serve him well, but he won't have a ton of experienced faces helping him out early on — lineman Joseph Noteboom is TCU's only returning starter on offense. On defense, the hope is that last year's injury woes will pay long-term dividends. Defensive end James McFarland, linebacker Sammy Douglas and cornerback Ranthony Texada are all back healthy among a group that built depth last year.

19 LOUISVILLE CARDINALS

For decades, the Conference USA and Big East version of Louisville was more notable for their quarterbacks and prolific offenses. Two seasons into their ACC tenure, the Cardinals have kept themselves competitive with defense — a fact that may surprise play-caller extraordinaire Bobby Petrino as much as anyone. Louisville, 10–6 in two seasons in the ACC, is on solid footing in the league, but the Cardinals need their offense to take a step forward if they're going to close on Florida State and Clemson in the Atlantic Division.

Louisville's defense should be solid again, with Keith Kelsey, DeAngelo Brown and Devonte Fields anchoring an imposing front seven. On offense, the Cardinals return eight starters, but the focus is on Lamar Jackson. The dual-threat quarterback is a rising star in the league, but he needs to show more consistency as a passer. The Cardinals won't get much love in the Atlantic Division thanks to an 0–4 record against Clemson and Florida State the last two seasons. A magical game from Jackson, though, could flip that script in a hurry.

MICKY CRUM

IOWA

20 IOWA HAWKEYES

For Iowa, this is the hard part. The Hawkeyes were the surprise team of 2015, starting the season 12–0 and winning the Big Ten West Division. Only Michigan State's 22-play, nine-minute drive prevented Iowa from reaching the College Football Playoff. Iowa's season of good fortune then reached its limits with a 45–16 loss to Stanford in the Rose Bowl. So what happens next? Recent history says Iowa could have trouble sustaining such a high level of play. The Hawkeyes haven't had back-to-back 10-win seasons since three straight from 2002-04.

The Hawkeyes were more than the sum of their parts last season, anyway. Iowa went 5–1 in one-score games and 8–0 in the Big Ten despite ranking 72nd nationally in total offense and 22nd in total defense. There are reasons, however, to believe Iowa can return to the Big Ten title game. C.J. Beathard emerged as one of the Big Ten's most effective quarterbacks, and he should again be able to lean on a reliable running game. Eight starters are back on defense, including impact players Josey Jewell at linebacker and Desmond King at corner. And once again, Iowa gets a big break with the schedule. Facing Northwestern, Wisconsin and Nebraska at home is a major leg up in the more manageable Big Ten West, and the Hawkeyes avoid Michigan State and Ohio State from the East again.

21 FLORIDA GATORS

Even to the most ardent Florida fan, the Gators' 10–4 finish in Jim McElwain's first season has to look odd. The season started with plenty of promise, including an improbable fourth-quarter comeback against Tennessee and then a 28-point rout of Ole Miss. Then the wheels came off. Quarterback Will Grier was suspended in October for testing positive for a banned substance. Without Grier, the offense was non-functional again. Florida scored two offensive touchdowns in the final three games against Florida State, Alabama and Michigan.

The offense will be the major question in McElwain's second season in Gainesville — as it was for the entirety of Will Muschamp's tenure. The defense will be among the SEC's best with Jalen Tabor at cornerback and Caleb Brantley, Bryan Cox Jr. and Jarrad Davis anchoring the front seven. The quarterback questions remain, with Oregon State transfer Luke Del Rio taking over an offense with one bona fide star in wide receiver Antonio Callaway. The Gators are a flawed team, but if they can continue their hex on Tennessee and Georgia, they're a flawed team that can win the SEC East.

NORTH CAROLINA

22 NORTH CAROLINA
TAR HEELS

OK, North Carolina, you have our attention now. With the possible exception of Iowa, no team seemed to change its place in the national landscape through the course of last season more than the Tar Heels. North Carolina opened the season with 17–13 loss to South Carolina. Thanks to a light schedule, UNC didn't reappear on the national radar until mid-November. The offense returned to its explosive form, and the defense had improved from terrible in 2014 to merely below average in 2015. The result was a Coastal Division title and an eight-point loss to Clemson in the ACC title game.

This season, North Carolina will try to carry its October and November through an entire season. Productive quarterback Marquise Williams is gone, but Mitch Trubisky is no newbie at the position. He'll have a standout offensive line and running back Elijah Hood in his corner, too. Six returning starters on defense will try to continue the progress made under first-year coordinator Gene Chizik. The Heels benefited from a light schedule last season. This year, they'll know where they stand, with Georgia and Florida State in the first five weeks.

23 USC
TROJANS

Promoting Clay Helton from interim coach might not have been the big splashy move some USC fans wanted, but his hire is a departure from Lane Kiffin and Steve Sarkisian. Like Kiffin and Sarkisian, Helton is former offensive coordinator with plenty of familiarity with the USC landscape. Unlike his two predecessors, Helton has no direct ties to the Pete Carroll era, and he lacks their California swagger, though he may not need it.

USC is hoping Helton will create some stability. In addition to dealing with NCAA sanctions, the current seniors have played for four full-time and interim head coaches. Absent any more coaching drama, USC could flourish. Wide receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster and cornerback/returnman Adoreeé Jackson provide USC with two of the top playmakers in the Pac-12. Junior Max Browne, a five-star prospect out of high school, will finally get the call after waiting behind Cody Kessler. Three defensive linemen and linebacker Su'a Cravens are gone from a defense that was mediocre last season. With a brutal schedule, Helton may quickly learn that being the full-time coach isn't as forgiving as being the interim guy.

24 OREGON
DUCKS

The Ducks are one season removed from winning the Pac-12, playing for the national championship and producing a Heisman winner. And yet Oregon seems to be at something of a crossroads. The Ducks went 9–4 last season, the first time since 2007 the program didn't win 10 games or more. A collapse in the Alamo Bowl prevented the Ducks from getting to the 10-win plateau but also highlighted Oregon's problems. The Ducks couldn't hold a 31-point halftime lead against TCU as the Horned Frogs scored at will, winning 47–41 in overtime.

Oregon demoted coordinator Don Pellum and brought in former Michigan coach Brady Hoke to run the defense. In the meantime, the Ducks added Montana State quarterback Dakota Prukop, the second consecutive season Oregon has turned to the FCS ranks to fill an immediate need at quarterback. That strategy might not be sustainable in the long term, but for now, Prukop and running back Royce Freeman should lead one of the best offenses in the Pac-12. But unless the defense — which ranked 117th in the nation last season — shows significant improvement, Oregon could lose more ground in the tough Pac-12 North.

MASON RUDOLPH

25 OKLAHOMA STATE
COWBOYS

Even Mike Gundy might agree Oklahoma State was a bit ahead of schedule last season. The Cowboys won 10 games for the fourth time in the last six seasons, but also showed they have work to do before they are considered Big 12 favorites. The Pokes beat Texas, Kansas State, West Virginia and Iowa State by a total of 16 points. By the end of the year, the Cowboys had lost three in a row — to Baylor, Oklahoma and Ole Miss, all by decisive margins. In other words, Oklahoma State eked out wins over mediocre teams and got crushed by the good ones. A 10-win season and a trip to the Sugar Bowl is nothing to dismiss, but this team clearly overachieved in 2015.

The bulk of Oklahoma State's starters last season were sophomores and juniors. Almost all of them are back for a run at the Big 12 title. The departures may be few in number, but they are notable. Superb pass rushers Emmanuel Ogbah, an early entry to the NFL Draft, and Jimmy Bean, a fifth-year senior, are gone from the defense. Backup quarterback J.W. Walsh, Oklahoma State's only legitimate option in the run game, is also gone. Mason Rudolph and James Washington should form one of the league's best pass-catch duos, but they'll need help if Oklahoma State is to stay on schedule.

North Carolina: Chris Keane; Oklahoma State, Arkansas: Tim Umphrey; Rutgers: David Tulis

RANKING THE REST

ARKANSAS

26. Arkansas
27. Miami
28. Texas A&M
29. Virginia Tech
30. Washington State
31. Nebraska
32. Utah
33. Wisconsin
34. Boise State
35. Auburn
36. San Diego State
37. South Florida
38. Pittsburgh
39. Penn State
40. West Virginia
41. Mississippi State
42. Texas Tech
43. Texas
44. Northwestern
45. Arizona State
46. BYU
47. Kansas State
48. Georgia Tech
49. California
50. Arizona
51. Air Force
52. Temple
53. Duke
54. Cincinnati
55. Indiana
56. Kentucky
57. Vanderbilt
58. Appalachian State
59. NC State
60. Minnesota
61. Colorado
62. Missouri
63. South Carolina
64. Wake Forest
65. Boston College
66. Maryland
67. Navy
68. Southern Miss
69. Western Michigan
70. Middle Tennessee
71. Iowa State
72. Virginia
73. Marshall
74. Illinois
75. Syracuse
76. WKU
77. UConn
78. Arkansas State
79. Toledo
80. Northern Illinois
81. Georgia Southern
82. Utah State
83. Memphis
84. Tulsa
85. Louisiana Tech
86. Nevada
87. Rutgers
88. Central Michigan
89. Colorado State
90. Oregon State
91. Ohio
92. UTEP
93. New Mexico
94. East Carolina
95. Purdue
96. San Jose State
97. Bowling Green
98. Akron
99. Kansas
100. UCF
101. SMU
102. Troy
103. FAU
104. Old Dominion
105. FIU
106. UNLV
107. Louisiana-Lafayette
108. Fresno State
109. Rice
110. Georgia State
111. Army
112. Miami (Ohio)
113. Buffalo
114. Wyoming
115. South Alabama
116. Ball State
117. Tulane
118. Kent State
119. Idaho
120. New Mexico State
121. Hawaii
122. Texas State
123. UTSA
124. Eastern Michigan
125. Charlotte
126. ULM
127. UMass
128. North Texas

RUTGERS

CONFERENCE PREDICTIONS

Records are projections for the 2016 season, overall and conference, through the regular season and conference championship games

ACC

ATLANTIC
1. Florida State 12-1, 7-1
2. Clemson 11-1, 7-1
3. Louisville 9-3, 5-3
4. NC State 6-6, 3-5
5. Wake Forest 6-6, 3-5
6. Boston College 6-6, 2-6
7. Syracuse 4-8, 2-6

COASTAL
1. North Carolina 9-4, 6-2
2. Miami 8-4, 5-3
3. Virginia Tech 8-4, 5-3
4. Pittsburgh 7-5, 4-4
5. Georgia Tech 6-6, 3-5
6. Duke 5-7, 3-5
7. Virginia 3-9, 1-7

ACC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
Florida State over North Carolina

AMERICAN ATHLETIC

EAST
1. USF 9-4, 6-2
2. Temple 8-4, 5-3
3. Cincinnati 8-4, 5-3
4. UConn 6-6, 4-4
5. East Carolina 4-8, 3-5
6. UCF 3-9, 1-7

WEST
1. Houston 11-2, 8-0
2. Navy 8-4, 6-2
3. Memphis 7-5, 4-4
4. Tulsa 7-5, 4-4
5. SMU 4-8, 2-6
6. Tulane 2-10, 0-8

AAC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
Houston over USF

BIG 12
1. Oklahoma 10-2, 7-2
2. Baylor 9-3, 6-3
3. TCU 9-3, 6-3
4. Oklahoma State 9-3, 6-3
5. West Virginia 8-4, 5-4
6. Texas Tech 8-4, 5-4
7. Texas 6-6, 4-5
8. Kansas State 6-6, 4-5
9. Iowa State 4-8, 2-7
10. Kansas 2-10, 0-9

BIG TEN

EAST
1. Ohio State 12-1, 9-0
2. Michigan 11-1, 8-1
3. Michigan State 9-3, 7-2
4. Penn State 7-5, 5-4
5. Indiana 6-6, 3-6
6. Maryland 5-7, 2-7
7. Rutgers 3-9, 1-8

WEST
1. Iowa 10-3, 7-2
2. Nebraska 8-4, 6-3
3. Wisconsin 7-5, 5-4
4. Northwestern 7-5, 4-5
5. Minnesota 6-6, 3-6
6. Illinois 4-8, 2-7
7. Purdue 3-9, 1-8

BIG TEN CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
Ohio State over Iowa

CONFERENCE USA

EAST
1. Middle Tennessee 8-5, 6-2
2. Marshall 8-4, 6-2
3. WKU 8-4, 6-2
4. FAU 6-6, 4-4
5. Old Dominion 6-6, 4-4
6. FIU 4-8, 3-5
7. Charlotte 2-10, 1-7

WEST
1. Southern Miss 10-3, 7-1
2. Louisiana Tech 7-5, 5-3
3. UTEP 7-5, 4-4
4. Rice 4-8, 3-5
5. UTSA 3-9, 2-6
6. North Texas 2-10, 1-7

C-USA CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
Southern Miss over MTSU

INDEPENDENTS
1. Notre Dame 10-2
2. BYU 6-6
3. Army 4-8
4. UMass 1-11

MAC

EAST
1. Ohio 7-6, 5-3
2. Bowling Green 6-6, 5-3
3. Akron 6-6, 5-3
4. Miami, Ohio 4-8, 3-5
5. Buffalo 5-7, 3-5
6. Kent State 3-9, 1-7

WEST
1. Western Michigan 9-4, 6-2
2. Toledo 8-4, 6-2
3. Northern Illinois 8-4, 6-2
4. Central Michigan 7-5, 5-3
5. Ball State 3-9, 2-6
6. Eastern Michigan 3-9, 1-7

MAC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
Western Michigan over Ohio

Mountain West

MOUNTAIN
1. Boise State 11-2, 7-1
2. Air Force 10-2, 6-2
3. Utah State 7-5, 5-3
4. Colorado State 6-6, 4-4
5. New Mexico 6-6, 3-5
6. Wyoming 3-9, 1-7

WEST
1. San Diego State 10-3, 7-1
2. Nevada 7-5, 5-3
3. San Jose State 6-6, 5-3
4. UNLV 4-8, 2-6
5. Fresno State 3-9, 2-6
6. Hawaii 3-10, 1-7

MW CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
Boise State over San Diego State

Pac-12

NORTH
1. Washington 10-3, 6-3
2. Stanford 9-3, 6-3
3. Oregon 8-4, 5-4
4. Washington State 8-4, 5-4
5. California 6-6, 3-6
6. Oregon State 2-10, 1-8

SOUTH
1. UCLA 9-4, 7-2
2. USC 8-4, 6-3
3. Utah 8-4, 5-4
4. Arizona State 6-6, 4-5
5. Arizona 6-6, 4-5
6. Colorado 4-8, 2-7

PAC-12 CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
Washington over UCLA

SEC

EAST
1. Tennessee 10-3, 6-2
2. Georgia 9-3, 5-3
3. Florida 8-4, 5-3
4. Kentucky 6-6, 3-5
5. Vanderbilt 5-7, 2-6
6. Missouri 5-7, 2-6
7. South Carolina 4-8, 1-7

WEST
1. Alabama 12-1, 7-1
2. LSU 10-2, 6-2
3. Ole Miss 9-3, 6-2
4. Arkansas 8-4, 5-3
5. Texas A&M 7-5, 3-5
6. Auburn 6-6, 3-5
7. Mississippi State 6-6, 2-6

SEC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME
Alabama over Tennessee

Sun Belt
1. Appalachian State 9-3, 7-1
2. Arkansas State 8-4, 6-2
3. Georgia Southern 7-5, 6-2
4. Troy 6-6, 4-4
5. UL-Lafayette 6-6, 4-4
6. Georgia State 6-6, 4-4
7. South Alabama 5-7, 4-4
8. Idaho 4-8, 3-5
9. New Mexico State 3-9, 3-5
10. Texas State 3-9, 2-6
11. ULM 2-10, 1-7

Wesley Hitt

2016 BOWL PROJECTIONS

ALAMO
Big 12 vs. Pac-12
Baylor vs. Stanford

ARIZONA
Mountain West vs. TBA
Utah State vs. Arizona

ARMED FORCES
American vs. Big 12
Navy vs. Texas Tech

AUTONATION CURE
American vs. Sun Belt
Tulsa vs. Georgia Southern

BAHAMAS
American/MAC vs. Conference USA
Toledo vs. Marshall

BELK
ACC vs. SEC
North Carolina vs. Arkansas

BIRMINGHAM
American vs. SEC
UConn vs. Kentucky

BOCA RATON
American/MAC vs. Conference USA
Memphis vs. WKU

CITRUS
Big Ten vs. SEC
Michigan State vs. Ole Miss

CACTUS
Big 12 vs. Pac-12
Texas vs. Washington State

CAMELLIA
MAC vs. Sun Belt
Central Michigan vs. Troy

FAMOUS IDAHO POTATO
MAC vs. Mountain West
Ohio vs. Nevada

FOSTER FARMS
Big Ten vs. Pac-12
Northwestern vs. USC

GODADDY
MAC vs. Sun Belt
Northern Illinois vs. Arkansas State

HAWAII
Conference USA vs. Mountain West
Middle Tennessee vs. Air Force

HEART OF DALLAS
Big Ten vs. Conference USA
Minnesota vs. Louisiana Tech

HOLIDAY
Big Ten vs. Pac-12
Penn State vs. UCLA

INDEPENDENCE
ACC vs. SEC
Wake Forest vs. Arizona State*

LAS VEGAS
Mountain West vs. Pac-12
Boise State vs. Oregon

LIBERTY
Big 12 vs. SEC
West Virginia vs. Mississippi State

MIAMI BEACH
American vs. MAC
USF vs. Western Michigan

MILITARY
American vs. ACC
Temple vs. Boston College

MUSIC CITY
ACC/Big Ten vs. SEC
Wisconsin vs. Auburn

NEW MEXICO
Conference USA vs. Mountain West
UTEP vs. Colorado State

NEW ORLEANS
Conference USA vs. Sun Belt
Southern Miss vs. Appalachian State

OUTBACK
Big Ten vs. SEC
Iowa vs. Georgia

PINSTRIPE
ACC vs. Big Ten
Pittsburgh vs. Nebraska

POINSETTIA
BYU vs. Mountain West
BYU vs. San Diego State

QUICK LANE
ACC vs. Big Ten
Kansas State* vs. Indiana

RUSSELL ATHLETIC
ACC vs. Big 12
Miami vs. TCU

ST. PETERSBURG
American vs. ACC
Cincinnati vs. Georgia Tech

SUN
ACC vs. Pac-12
NC State vs. Utah

TAXSLAYER
Big Ten/ACC vs. SEC
Virginia Tech vs. Florida

TEXAS
Big 12 vs. SEC
Oklahoma State vs. Texas A&M

NEW YEARS'S SIX

COTTON
At-large vs. At-large
Houston vs. LSU

ORANGE
ACC vs. Notre Dame/Big Ten/SEC
Louisville vs. Notre Dame

ROSE
Big Ten vs. Pac-12
Michigan vs. Washington

SUGAR
Big 12 vs. SEC
Oklahoma vs. Tennessee

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

Playoff Semifinals
Peach Bowl
ALABAMA (1) vs. CLEMSON (4)

Playoff Semifinals
Fiesta Bowl
FLORIDA STATE (2) vs. OHIO STATE (3)

National Championship
Winner of Peach Bowl vs.
Winner of Fiesta Bowl
ALABAMA vs. FLORIDA STATE

* According to our projections, the ACC and SEC will fail to fill their allotted slots.

ATHLON SPORTS 2016 PRESEASON

ALL-AMERICA TEAM

CAM ROBINSON

DEVONTE FIELDS

FIRST TEAM

OFFENSE

QB	Deshaun Watson	6-2	210	Jr.	Clemson
RB	Dalvin Cook	5-11	206	Jr.	Florida State
RB	Leonard Fournette	6-1	230	Jr.	LSU
WR	Calvin Ridley	6-1	188	So.	Alabama
WR	JuJu Smith-Schuster	6-2	215	Jr.	USC
TE	Jordan Leggett	6-5	255	Sr.	Clemson
C	Pat Elflein	6-3	300	Sr.	Ohio State
OL	Zach Banner	6-9	360	Sr.	USC
OL	Dan Feeney	6-4	310	Sr.	Indiana
OL	Roderick Johnson	6-7	307	Jr.	Florida State
OL	Cam Robinson	6-6	327	Jr.	Alabama
AP	Christian McCaffrey	6-0	202	Jr.	Stanford

DEFENSE

DL	Jonathan Allen	6-3	294	Sr.	Alabama
DL	Derek Barnett	6-3	257	Jr.	Tennessee
DL	Myles Garrett	6-5	262	Jr.	Texas A&M
DL	Malik McDowell	6-6	280	Jr.	Michigan State
LB	Devonte Fields	6-4	245	Sr.	Louisville
LB	Raekwon McMillan	6-2	240	Jr.	Ohio State
LB	Anthony Walker	6-1	235	Jr.	Northwestern
CB	Desmond King	5-11	203	Sr.	Iowa
CB	Jourdan Lewis	5-10	175	Sr.	Michigan
S	Jamal Adams	6-1	211	Jr.	LSU
S	Derwin James	6-3	213	So.	Florida State

SPECIALISTS

K	Daniel Carlson	6-4	214	Jr.	Auburn
P	JK Scott	6-5	198	Jr.	Alabama
KR	Evan Berry	5-11	207	Jr.	Tennessee
PR	Cameron Sutton	5-11	186	Sr.	Tennessee

DANIEL CARLSON

Robinson: Chris Covatta; Fields: Carlson, White: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports; Freeman: Craig Mitchelldyer; Walker: Tom DiPace; Barrett: Ric Fogel

SECOND TEAM

OFFENSE

QB	Baker Mayfield	6-1	212	Sr.	Oklahoma
RB	Royce Freeman	5-11	230	Jr.	Oregon
RB	Samaje Perine	5-10	234	Jr.	Oklahoma
WR	Isaiah Ford	6-2	190	Jr.	Virginia Tech
WR	Christian Kirk	5-11	200	So.	Texas A&M
TE	Jake Butt	6-6	250	Sr.	Michigan
C	Ethan Pocic	6-7	309	Sr.	LSU
OL	Adam Bisnowaty	6-6	300	Sr.	Pittsburgh
OL	Mitch Hyatt	6-5	295	So.	Clemson
OL	Conor McDermott	6-9	310	Jr.	UCLA
OL	Sean Welsh	6-3	288	Jr.	Iowa
AP	Artavis Scott	5-11	190	Jr.	Clemson

DEFENSE

DL	Charles Harris	6-3	255	Jr.	Missouri
DL	Arden Key	6-6	231	So.	LSU
DL	Charles Walker	6-2	299	Jr.	Oklahoma
DL	DeMarcus Walker	6-3	273	Sr.	Florida State
LB	Zach Cunningham	6-4	230	Jr.	Vanderbilt
LB	Reuben Foster	6-1	240	Sr.	Alabama
LB	Jabrill Peppers	6-1	208	Jr.	Michigan
CB	Adoree' Jackson	5-11	185	Jr.	USC
CB	Jalen Tabor	6-0	199	Jr.	Florida
S	Budda Baker	5-10	184	Jr.	Washington
S	Eddie Jackson	6-0	194	Sr.	Alabama

SPECIALISTS

K	Andy Phillips	5-11	209	Sr.	Utah
P	Cameron Johnston	5-11	195	Sr.	Ohio State
KR	Rashaad Penny	5-11	210	Jr.	San Diego State
PR	William Likely	5-7	175	Sr.	Maryland

THIRD TEAM

OFFENSE

QB	J.T. Barrett	6-2	225	Jr.	Ohio State
RB	Wayne Gallman	6-1	215	Jr.	Clemson
RB	Elijah Hood	6-0	220	Jr.	North Carolina
WR	KD Cannon	6-0	180	Jr.	Baylor
WR	Gabe Marks	6-0	188	Sr.	Washington State
TE	Evan Engram	6-3	227	Sr.	Ole Miss
C	Tyler Orlosky	6-4	295	Sr.	West Virginia
OL	Brian Allen	6-2	303	Jr.	Michigan State
OL	Mason Cole	6-5	305	Jr.	Michigan
OL	Quenton Nelson	6-5	325	So.	Notre Dame
OL	Dan Skipper	6-10	326	Sr.	Arkansas
AP	Charles Nelson	5-8	170	Jr.	Oregon

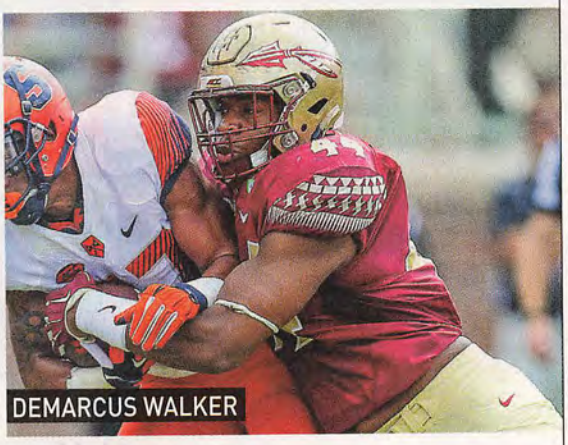
DEFENSE

DL	Lowell Lotulelei	6-2	310	Jr.	Utah
DL	Ejuan Price	6-0	250	Sr.	Pittsburgh
DL	Eddie Vanderdoes	6-4	305	Jr.	UCLA
DL	Chris Wormley	6-5	303	Sr.	Michigan
LB	Josey Jewell	6-2	235	Jr.	Iowa
LB	Keith Kelsey	6-1	236	Sr.	Louisville
LB	Jalen Reeves-Maybin	6-0	225	Sr.	Tennessee
CB	Cordrea Tankersley	6-1	195	Sr.	Clemson
CB	Tre'Davious White	5-11	191	Sr.	LSU
S	Marcus Maye	6-0	210	Sr.	Florida
S	Jordan Whitehead	5-11	185	So.	Pittsburgh

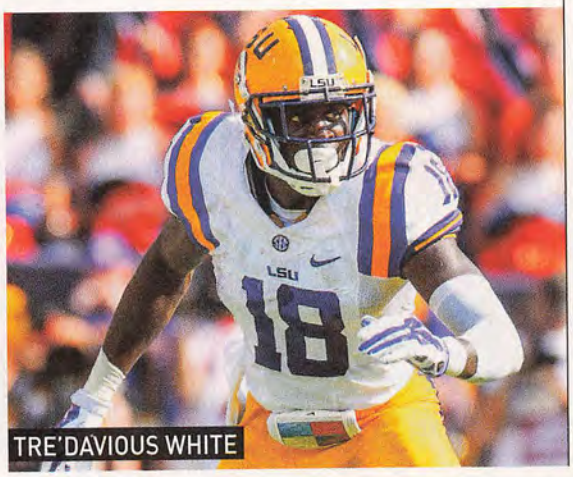
SPECIALISTS

K	Jake Elliott	5-10	165	Sr.	Memphis
P	Hayden Hunt	6-0	220	Sr.	Colorado State
KR	Christian McCaffrey	6-0	202	Jr.	Stanford
PR	Antonio Callaway	5-11	195	So.	Florida

ROYCE FREEMAN


DEMARCUS WALKER

J.T. BARRETT


TRE'DAVIOUS WHITE

THE 16TH ANNUAL ATHLON AWARDS

ATLANTIC COAST

	QB	RB	WR/TE	OL	DL	LB	DB
BOSTON COLLEGE	10	8	13	10	7	4	6
CLEMSON	1	2	1	1	2	2	2
DUKE	14	11	10	7	13	14	10
FLORIDA STATE	5	1	2	4	1	3	1
GEORGIA TECH	6	10	14	11	11	9	1
LOUISVILLE	3	9	4	9	9	1	3
MIAMI	2	5	6	6	3	5	8
NORTH CAROLINA	4	4	3	2	10	13	4
NC STATE	13	6	9	8	6	8	12
PITTSBURGH	7	3	11	3	4	6	7
SYRACUSE	8	12	8	14	14	11	14
VIRGINIA	9	13	12	12	12	7	9
VIRGINIA TECH	11	7	5	5	5	12	5
WAKE FOREST	12	14	7	13	8	10	11

AMERICAN

	QB	RB	WR/TE	OL	DL	LB	DB
CINCINNATI	3	3	9	4	9	9	7
CONNECTICUT	9	8	10	9	3	4	1
EAST CAROLINA	10	9	1	7	6	8	3
HOUSTON	1	5	2	1	1	1	5
MEMPHIS	11	4	5	2	5	7	6
NAVY	8	11	11	8	7	6	9
SMU	7	10	6	11	12	12	12
TEMPLE	5	2	8	3	2	5	4
TULANE	12	7	12	12	8	11	10
TULSA	4	6	3	6	10	3	11
UCF	6	12	4	10	11	10	8
USF	2	1	7	5	4	2	2

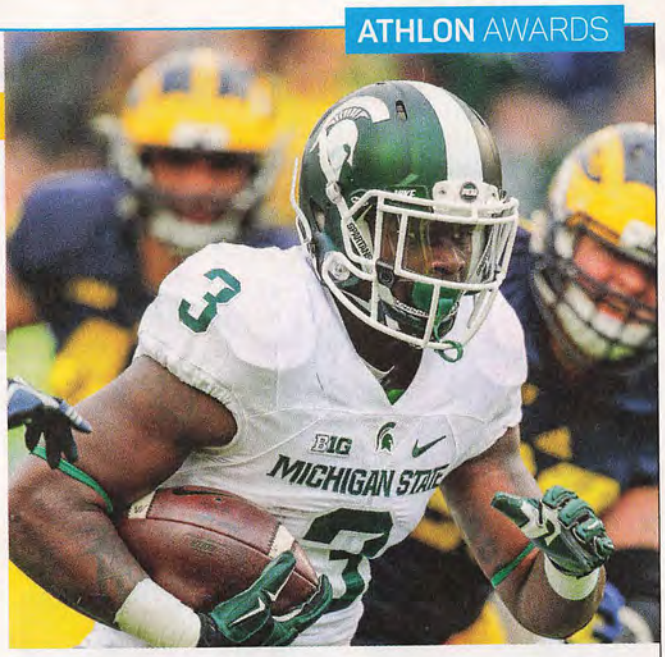
BIG 12

	QB	RB	WR/TE	OL	DL	LB	DB
BAYLOR	2	2	1	2	8	5	5
IOWA STATE	8	4	7	9	7	7	7
KANSAS	10	10	10	10	10	9	10
KANSAS STATE	9	8	9	8	4	2	6
OKLAHOMA	1	1	6	4	1	6	1
OKLAHOMA STATE	4	9	2	6	5	4	2
TCU	5	5	3	3	2	1	3
TEXAS	7	3	8	5	3	3	4
TEXAS TECH	3	7	5	7	9	8	9
WEST VIRGINIA	6	6	4	1	6	10	8

Scott: Tom DiPace; Jones: East Carolina Athletics; Mayfie.d: Layne Murdoch; Scott: Tom Lynn; Taylor: Brandon Carter/WKU Athletics; Poliq: Marvin Gentry-USA Today Sports

BIG TEN

	QB	RB	WR/TE	OL	DL	LB	DB
ILLINOIS	4	12	8	11	8	13	13
INDIANA	11	10	4	4	14	8	11
IOWA	2	6	10	3	4	5	2
MARYLAND	14	13	7	12	9	11	10
MICHIGAN	8	7	1	1	1	7	1
MICHIGAN STATE	7	1	6	5	3	2	3
MINNESOTA	5	11	9	9	11	9	9
NEBRASKA	3	8	2	7	12	10	8
NORTHWESTERN	6	5	14	8	7	4	5
OHIO STATE	1	4	5	2	2	3	4
PENN STATE	9	3	3	10	6	6	7
PURDUE	12	14	13	14	13	12	14
RUTGERS	13	9	11	13	10	14	12
WISCONSIN	10	2	12	6	5	1	6



CONFERENCE USA

	QB	RB	WR/TE	OL	DL	LB	DB
CHARLOTTE	13	9	6	12	12	9	8
FAU	9	8	8	7	4	3	4
FIU	4	10	9	8	11	1	10
LOUISIANA TECH	11	13	2	2	6	11	6
MARSHALL	3	12	4	3	2	5	3
MTSU	2	5	3	6	1	10	2
NORTH TEXAS	7	11	13	10	13	12	11
OLD DOMINION	6	3	5	11	7	7	7
RICE	12	7	11	9	9	8	13
SOUTHERN MISS	1	2	7	5	3	4	1
UTEP	10	4	10	4	10	6	9
UTSA	8	6	12	13	8	13	12
WKU	5	1	1	1	5	2	5

MID-AMERICAN

	QB	RB	WR/TE	OL	DL	LB	DB
AKRON	4	11	8	12	3	12	4
BALL STATE	7	4	9	11	12	5	11
BOWLING GREEN	6	5	7	2	9	3	5
BUFFALO	11	6	10	9	8	7	7
CENTRAL MICHIGAN	2	9	1	8	7	6	3
EASTERN MICHIGAN	8	10	12	5	11	11	12
KENT STATE	12	12	11	10	2	9	1
MIAMI	10	8	5	7	5	10	6
NORTHERN ILLINOIS	3	3	2	4	6	4	2
OHIO	9	7	6	6	1	1	10
TOLEDO	5	1	3	1	4	2	8
WESTERN MICHIGAN	1	2	4	3	10	8	9

MOUNTAIN WEST

	QB	RB	WR/TE	OL	DL	LB	DB
AIR FORCE	7	4	10	6	3	6	5
BOISE STATE	1	3	1	4	2	2	2
COLORADO STATE	3	8	8	1	9	4	9
FRESNO STATE	10	12	6	12	11	10	8
HAWAII	11	6	3	8	6	7	11
NEVADA	5	5	5	5	8	12	4
NEW MEXICO	6	9	11	10	5	3	12
SAN DIEGO STATE	8	1	12	2	1	1	1
SAN JOSE STATE	4	11	2	9	7	5	6
UNLV	9	10	7	11	10	9	7
UTAH STATE	2	7	9	3	4	11	3

PAC-12

	QB	RB	WR/TE	OL	DL	LB	DB
ARIZONA	5	7	6	8	11	9	11
ARIZONA STATE	10	4	5	10	3	2	9
CALIFORNIA	9	8	11	6	7	6	10
COLORADO	7	11	7	11	10	7	8
OREGON	4	2	3	7	6	8	7
OREGON STATE	11	12	8	12	12	11	12
STANFORD	8	1	4	5	5	4	4
UCLA	1	6	9	4	4	1	2
USC	6	3	1	1	9	5	5
UTAH	12	9	12	2	1	12	3
WASHINGTON	3	5	10	3	2	3	1
WASHINGTON STATE	2	10	2	9	8	10	6

SOUTHEASTERN

	QB	RB	WR/TE	OL	DL	LB	DB
ALABAMA	5	4	1	1	1	1	1
ARKANSAS	7	10	4	8	9	10	12
AUBURN	12	5	11	4	8	11	9
FLORIDA	8	9	9	9	6	4	3
GEORGIA	6	2	10	5	10	3	4
KENTUCKY	9	6	8	10	14	14	13
LSU	3	1	5	2	2	7	2
MISSOURI	14	14	13	14	3	6	10
MISS. STATE	10	12	6	11	11	9	11
OLE MISS	1	11	3	6	4	12	5
SOUTH CAROLINA	11	13	14	13	13	8	14
TENNESSEE	2	3	7	3	5	2	6
TEXAS A&M	4	8	2	7	7	13	7
VANDERBILT	13	7	12	12	12	5	8

SUN BELT

	QB	RB	WR/TE	OL	DL	LB	DB
APPALACHIAN STATE	1	2	7	2	2	1	1
ARKANSAS STATE	7	5	2	1	1	2	2
GEORGIA STATE	11	7	1	10	4	5	3
GEORGIA SOUTHERN	2	1	10	3	3	3	9
IDAHO	6	10	4	5	10	9	7
UL LAFAYETTE	9	4	8	7	6	7	6
UL MONROE	4	8	3	11	11	11	8
NEW MEXICO STATE	8	3	5	9	8	4	11
SOUTH ALABAMA	10	6	9	6	7	8	4
TEXAS STATE	5	11	11	8	9	10	10
TROY	3	9	6	4	5	6	5

Rypien: Boise State Athletics; McCaffrey: Tom Lynn Allen; Chris Covatta; Rolland-Jones: Arkansas State Athletics; Watson: Tom DiPace

NATIONAL UNIT RANKINGS

QUARTERBACKS	RUNNING BACKS	RECEIVERS
1. Clemson	1. Oklahoma	1. Clemson
2. Oklahoma	2. LSU	2. Alabama
3. Ohio State	3. Florida State	3. Texas A&M
4. Notre Dame	4. Stanford	4. Ole Miss
5. Baylor	5. Oregon	5. Baylor
6. Houston	6. Baylor	6. USC
7. Ole Miss	7. Georgia	7. Michigan
8. Texas Tech	8. Tennessee	8. Florida State
9. Miami	9. Clemson	9. North Carolina
10. UCLA	10. USC	10. Arkansas

OFFENSIVE LINE	DEFENSIVE LINE	LINEBACKERS	DEFENSIVE BACKS
1. Clemson	1. Alabama	1. Alabama	1. Alabama
2. Alabama	2. Michigan	2. Louisville	2. LSU
3. LSU	3. Utah	3. Tennessee	3. Florida
4. Michigan	4. LSU	4. Wisconsin	4. Michigan
5. Ohio State	5. Florida State	5. Michigan State	5. Florida State
6. North Carolina	6. Missouri	6. Ohio State	6. Washington
7. Pittsburgh	7. Ole Miss	7. TCU	7. UCLA
8. USC	8. Ohio State	8. Georgia	8. Oklahoma
9. Utah	9. Clemson	9. Florida	9. Iowa
10. Tennessee	10. Tennessee	10. UCLA	10. Georgia

EXTRA POINTS

COOPER BATEMAN

TOP QB BATTLES

ALABAMA For the third consecutive offseason, the Crimson Tide entered spring ball with a question mark at quarterback. But that's not necessarily cause for concern, as offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin coaxed solid performances out of Blake Sims and Jake Coker the past two seasons. Cooper Bateman, with one career start, is the most experienced candidate. Bateman completed 37-of-52 attempts for 291 yards in limited action in 2015. Redshirt freshman Blake Barnett is the highest-ranked quarterback recruit signed by Nick Saban in Tuscaloosa and brings a dual-threat element to the offense. Sophomore David Cornwell has not played in two years on campus, and freshman Jalen Hurts is likely headed for a redshirt season.
Projected Winner: BATEMAN

ARKANSAS The Razorbacks quietly led the SEC in scoring in league play last year at 34.4 points per game. However, coordinator Dan Enos faces a rebuilding job in 2016 as several key players depart the offense — most notably quarterback Brandon Allen. Enos has four talented options to choose from in 2016. USC transfer Ricky Town has the most overall talent, sophomore Rafe Peavey was one of the top recruits in Arkansas' 2014 signing class, and Ty Storey joins the mix after a redshirt year. However, all three are chasing Austin Allen, Brandon's brother. Allen has made eight career appearances and completed 9-of-19 passes for 188 yards and one score.
Projected winner: ALLEN

AUBURN The Tigers are coming off their worst offensive season in Gus Malzahn's three years as the program's coach. Quarterback play was largely to blame for the struggles. Jeremy Johnson, who never met preseason expectations, shared the job with Sean White. Johnson and White combined for just 11 touchdown passes and tossed 12 picks, and Auburn exceeded 200 yards passing in only four games. Both players are back in the mix and will be joined in the competition by junior college transfer John Franklin III and true freshman Woody Barrett. Franklin spent two years at Florida State and one season at East Mississippi Community College. He's a dynamic runner but is still developing as a passer.
Projected winner: FRANKLIN

BYU New coach Kalani Sitake already has a big decision on his hands this offseason. The Cougars have two proven quarterbacks — Taysom Hill and Tanner Mangum — for one spot. Hill suffered a season-ending foot injury in Week 1 last year and was limited in spring practice. Prior to his injury, Hill was one of the nation's top quarterbacks and has accumulated 6,818 total yards in his BYU career. Mangum impressed in his first opportunity, leading the Cougars to last-second wins against Nebraska and Boise State while finishing the season with 3,377 passing yards and 23 scores. BYU plans to utilize more of a pro-style attack under new play-caller Ty Detmer, which would favor Mangum's skill set.
Projected winner: MANGUM

FLORIDA Will Grier's midseason suspension was a major blow to Florida's offensive attack last fall. After Grier's suspension, the Gators managed only eight passing touchdowns in the final eight games and completed fewer than 50 percent of their passes in the last four games. With Treon Harris moving to receiver, Oregon State transfer Luke Del Rio is the favorite to start over Purdue transfer Austin Appleby and freshmen Kyle Trask and Feleipe Franks. Del Rio has spent time at Alabama and Oregon State but has attempted only 18 passes at the FBS level. Franks — the No. 54 prospect in the 2016 247Sports Composite — is the future for McElwain and the Gators.
Projected Winner: DEL RIO

FLORIDA STATE In Year 1 of the post-Jameis Winston era, Florida State struggled to get consistent quarterback play for the first time during Jimbo Fisher's tenure. Notre Dame graduate transfer Everett Golson started the first seven games but was benched in favor of Sean Maguire in five out of the last six contests. Maguire ended the year on a down note by tossing four picks in the Chick-fil-A Bowl loss to Houston and suffered an ankle injury that kept him out of spring workouts. With Maguire sidelined, freshmen Deondre Francois and Malik Henry and sophomore J.J. Cosentino had opportunities to make their case for the starting job in the spring. Henry was the most touted recruit out of that trio, and Cosentino has struggled in limited action. Francois, a top-75 national recruit in the 2015 class, is poised to unseat Maguire for the starting job.
Projected winner: FRANCOIS

GEORGIA The regression of Georgia's offense in 2015 was a big reason why Mark Richt was dismissed in favor of Kirby Smart. The Bulldogs averaged only 26.3 points per game last year, which was the lowest mark for this program since 2006. Last year's primary starter, Greyson Lambert, is back as a fifth-year senior but could have a tough time winning the job. The same can be said for junior

Bateman: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports; Swoopes: Layne Murdoch

Brice Ramsey, who played in 11 games in 2015. The long-term answer at the position is true freshman Jacob Eason, a Washington native who committed to Richt's staff and — after some nervous moments for Bulldog fans — honored that commitment and signed with Georgia. Eason, the No. 5 overall prospect in the 2016 247Sports Composite, is likely to earn the starting assignment at some point in the 2016 season, but Lambert is the safe pick to start in Week 1.
Projected winner: LAMBERT

MICHIGAN Jim Harbaugh is one of the nation's top quarterback coaches, so it's a safe bet this position will move from a question mark to a strength during the 2016 season. Jake Rudock became only the second player in school history to eclipse 3,000 passing yards last year, and Harbaugh is hoping another transfer — John O'Korn from Houston — can replicate that success in 2016. O'Korn posted an impressive freshman season in 2013 but regressed as a sophomore. He's far from entrenched as the No. 1 QB, as junior Shane Morris is back in the mix after a redshirt year, and sophomore Wilton Speight is pushing for snaps. Freshman Brandon Peters enrolled in time to compete in spring practice but is likely headed for a redshirt year.
Projected winner: O'KORN

MICHIGAN STATE Connor Cook completed his career as the winningest quarterback in school history, guided Michigan State to two Big Ten titles in three years and set a new program record with 9,194 passing yards. The Spartans got an early look at the 2016 quarterback battle when Cook was forced to sit against Ohio State due to a shoulder injury. Tyler O'Connor and Damion Terry shared snaps and played well enough against the Buckeyes to propel Michigan State to an upset victory. O'Connor has the edge in experience as a fifth-year senior and has attempted 54 passes over the last three seasons. Terry brings more mobility to the offense, and if he doesn't win the starting job, the junior could be used in a few specialty packages. Redshirt freshman Brian Lewerke is in the mix but is considered a longshot to pass Terry or O'Connor.
Projected winner: O'CONNOR

MISSISSIPPI STATE Replacing Dak Prescott — arguably the best player in school history — is no easy task. Prescott accounted for 73 percent of Mississippi State's offense last season, and his mobility was a huge asset with a struggling rushing attack and offensive line. Damian Williams started one game for the Bulldogs in 2013 and is back in the mix after a redshirt year last season. Sophomore Nick Fitzgerald was Prescott's backup in 2015 and showed promise in completing 11-of-14 passes for 235 yards and three scores in limited snaps. Sophomore Elijah Staley and redshirt freshman Nick Tiano are also in the mix.
Projected winner: FITZGERALD

NOTRE DAME The Fighting Irish have a good problem on their hands. Finding one quarterback is enough of a challenge for some teams, but Notre Dame has two viable starting options battling for time. Malik Zaire was off to a fast start in 2015 but suffered a season-ending leg injury in the second game. DeShone Kizer showed plenty of poise in replacing Zaire, throwing for a game-winning touchdown against Virginia in the final seconds. Kizer finished the season with 2,880 passing yards and 21 scores and added 520 yards and 10 touchdowns on the ground. Sophomore Brandon Wimbush is also in the mix. Kizer's success last season could be the deciding factor.
Projected winner: KIZER

PENN STATE Third-year coach James Franklin is hitting the reset button on offense. Franklin fired John Donovan and hired Joe Moorhead from an FCS head coaching job (Fordham) to coordinate the offense. Moorhead has promised to blend some principles of the West Coast offense with tempo, but the new coordinator first has to find a quarterback. Trace McSorley is the favorite to replace Christian Hackenberg, but the sophomore has only seven games of experience. With a struggling offensive line, McSorley's ability to make plays with his legs could be a valuable asset. Pushing McSorley for the job will be true freshman Jake Zembiec and redshirt freshman Tommy Stevens.
Projected Winner: MCSORLEY

STANFORD Kevin Hogan wasn't the most prolific passer, but the steady Virginia native was a good fit for Stanford's complex offense. However, the Cardinal aren't hurting for talent at QB. All three candidates — K.J. Costello, Ryan Burns and Keller Chryst — ranked as four-star recruits. Chryst is the favorite after spending last season as the backup and completing 5-of-9 passes for 59 yards and one score. Burns is one year older than Chryst but has thrown only one pass in game action. Costello is expected to redshirt.
Projected winner: CHRYST

TCU Gary Patterson's decision to hire Doug Meacham as TCU's play caller has transformed the Horned Frogs' offense into one of the best in the Big 12. TCU has averaged over 40 points in back-to-back seasons, but Meacham is looking for a new signal caller after Trevone Boykin expired his eligibility. Kenny Hill spent two seasons at Texas A&M and decided to transfer after losing the starting job in 2014. When he did play, Hill showed plenty of promise by completing 66.7 percent of his passes for 2,649 yards and 23 scores that season. Sophomore Foster Sawyer is Hill's top competition after playing in four games last year and closed the gap for the No. 1 job in spring practice.
Projected winner: HILL

TEXAS The quarterback position has been a revolving door in Austin since Colt McCoy departed in 2009. And the Longhorns once again enter a season filled with uncertainty under center.

DESHONE KIZER

New coordinator Sterlin Gilbert is an Art Briles disciple, but the transition to a wide-open spread attack will take time without a clear answer at quarterback. Jerrod Heard started 10 games last season and finished with 1,214 yards and five TDs. Tyrone Swoopes had two starts and 11 overall appearances but didn't fare much better in the passing department (537 yards). Both players have the ability to be dynamic playmakers on the ground but have not shown enough consistency throwing the ball. True freshman Shane Buechele was the cornerstone of the 2016 signing class and was an early enrollee. The Arlington, Texas, native impressed the staff in the spring with his poise and his accuracy. Don't be surprised if he gets the start in Week 1.
Projected winner: BUECHELE

10 OTHERS TO WATCH

TEAM	PROJECTED STARTER
ARIZONA STATE	Manny Wilkins
CALIFORNIA	Chase Forrest
OREGON	Dakota Prukop
SOUTH CAROLINA	Brandon McIlwain
TEXAS A&M	Trevor Knight
USC	Max Browne
UTAH	Troy Williams
VIRGINIA TECH	Jerod Evans
WISCONSIN	Bart Houston
WKU	Mike White

CONFERENCE RANKINGS

ALABAMA

1. SEC

Until another conference makes a compelling case to wrestle the top spot from the SEC, this league remains the dominant force in college football. In the CFB Playoff, Alabama crushed Big Ten champion Michigan State and handed Clemson its only loss of the season to claim an eighth national title in 10 years for the SEC. The brag sheet continues: The entire SEC West went to bowls for the second year in a row, the league went 9–2 in the postseason as a whole, and the conference had five teams in the final AP top 25. The East, which has not produced the league champion since 2008, could start to make up ground if Tennessee becomes a title contender, if Florida continues its improvement under Jim McElwain, and if Kirby Smart brings Georgia the edge it needs.
Favorite: ALABAMA

2. Big Ten

The Big Ten produced six teams that won at least 10 games — more than any other conference — but that couldn't mask that most of the power resides in the East division. The addition of Jim Harbaugh to a division that already included Urban Meyer, Mark Dantonio and James Franklin raised the recruiting profile of the conference and has ensured that the Big Ten won't fall behind the rest of the Power 5. The West is a different story. With the exception of the Hawkeyes' performance in the Big Ten title game, Iowa (12–2) and Northwestern (10–3) were not competitive in their biggest games of the year. Wisconsin won 10 games with smoke and mirrors, and Nebraska couldn't get out of its own way on the way to a 6–7 season.
Favorite: OHIO STATE

3. Pac-12

Two schools in the North (Stanford and Oregon) have produced the conference champion in each of the last seven seasons. This could be the season that trend comes to a halt. Stanford and Oregon should be solid again. But Washington is poised to return to the national stage, and UCLA has the league's best quarterback in Josh Rosen. Talented USC can't be counted out, either. With Oregon State's Seth Collins moving to receiver, the Pac-12 returns only five starting quarterbacks, making it the only Power 5 conference that must replace more than half of its starters at the position.
Favorite: WASHINGTON

4. Big 12

Even Oklahoma's appearance in the College Football Playoff couldn't end speculation that the Big 12 will someday, somehow expand. As it is, the Big 12 remains — stylistically speaking — the most up-and-down conference in the country. The league produced four of the top seven offenses and six of the top 25. The Sooners, ranked 39th, were the league's only top-40 defense. Oklahoma will be a playoff contender again. TCU must replace dynamic quarterback Trevone Boykin, and Baylor is rebuilding in the trenches. The conference will look to Oklahoma State to take a step forward and for Texas, 11–14 under Charlie Strong, to show some signs of life.
Favorite: OKLAHOMA

5. ACC

The ACC has become a two-team league with Clemson and Florida State claiming each of the last five conference championships. In each of the last three seasons, either the Tigers or the Seminoles have gone into bowl season as the nation's last undefeated team. That said, Dabo Swinney and Jimbo Fisher can't get too comfortable: A handful of ACC teams have plans in place to catch up. North Carolina emerged from the always-competitive Coastal Division last season and shows no signs of slowing down. Miami and Virginia Tech made coaching hires that should return both to solid footing.
Favorite: FLORIDA STATE

6. American

The AAC is coming off the best season in its short history with Houston, Temple, Navy and Memphis leading the way on the national stage. Those four teams accounted for wins over Florida State, Ole Miss, Penn State, Louisville and Pittsburgh. The league must replace some outgoing quarterback and coaching talent, but there's enough remaining to keep the AAC the leader among the Group of 5 conferences. Houston's coach-QB tandem in Tom Herman and Greg Ward Jr. would be the envy of a majority of Power 5 teams.
Favorite: HOUSTON

7. Mountain West

The Mountain West started last season with a thud as the league lost 22 consecutive non-conference games through the first three weeks. It's no surprise that a league that lost TCU, Utah and BYU over the years is still trying to find its way. The MW will need San Diego State to build upon its 11-win season in 2015 and for Boise State (9–4) to continue to be a thorn in the side of the power players. Air Force and Utah State will be tough outs.
Favorite: BOISE STATE

8. MAC

MACtion is alive and well on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights in November, but in the big picture, the MAC may be little more than a pleasant diversion. The best teams in the league last season, Bowling Green and Toledo, lost their coaches to Power 5 schools. Quarterback talent and experience at Central Michigan, Northern Illinois and Western Michigan will set up a heated race in the West.
Favorite: WESTERN MICHIGAN

9. Conference USA

Two departures, one expected (WKU quarterback Brandon Doughty) and one abrupt (Southern Miss coach Todd Monken) could hold Conference USA back from producing a CFP host bowl contender. Nevertheless, this remains a league with exciting offenses at the top. But half the league could be among the 30 worst teams in college football.
Favorite: SOUTHERN MISS

10. Sun Belt

The addition of Appalachian State and Georgia Southern has been a stroke of genius. Both were national champions at the FCS level and have made a seamless transition. Defending Sun Belt champion Arkansas State has perfected the formula of winning at this level.
Favorite: APPALACHIAN STATE

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

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HEISMAN TROPHY CONTENDERS

DESHAUN WATSON

1. DESHAUN WATSON, QB
CLEMSON

Watson was spectacular as a sophomore as Clemson made its run to the College Football Playoff title game. The Georgia native became the first player in college football history to top 4,000 yards passing and 1,000 yards rushing in the same season. Could we see the first 5,000/1,000 season in 2016?

2. LEONARD FOURNETTE, RB
LSU

Fournette, one of the most physically impressive running backs in the past decade, led the nation in rushing with 162.8 yards per game. He struggled, however, in the Tigers' three losses, gaining 31 yards against Alabama, 91 against Arkansas and 108 (on 25 carries) against Ole Miss. He will need to be at his best in the big games to earn a trip to New York next December.

3. DALVIN COOK, RB
FLORIDA STATE

In a year that featured heroic performances from Leonard Fournette and Christian McCaffrey, many in the college football world considered Cook the best running back in the nation. As a sophomore, he battled through injury to rush for 1,691 yards on a 7.4-yard average. He had 266 yards against South Florida, 222 vs. Miami, 194 vs. Clemson and 183 vs. Florida.

4. CHRISTIAN MCCAFFREY, RB
STANFORD

McCaffrey might have won the Heisman last season if voters were allowed to wait until after the bowl games to cast their ballot. He capped an outstanding sophomore season with 368 all-purpose yards (including 100-plus rushing and 100-plus receiving) in the Cardinal's 45-16 Rose Bowl win.

5. BAKER MAYFIELD, QB
OKLAHOMA

Mayfield was terrific in his inaugural season at Oklahoma, averaging 284.6 yards passing per game with 36 touchdowns and only seven interceptions. More important, he guided the Sooners to the No. 4 seed in the College Football Playoff.

6. J.T. BARRETT, QB
OHIO STATE

Barrett enjoyed a sensational 2014 season before going down with an injury in the regular-season finale. Last fall, he did not earn his first start until the 10th game of the season. With the position all to himself in 2016, expect Barrett to return to form as one of the most dynamic quarterbacks in the nation.

7. CHAD KELLY, QB
OLE MISS

The one-time Clemson Tiger thrived in his first season at Ole Miss, leading the SEC with 310.9 passing yards per game and 31 touchdowns. After a midseason mini-slump, Kelly threw only one interception in the Rebels' final four games. He lost his top weapon (wide receiver Laquon Treadwell), but Ole Miss still boasts plenty of capable pass-catchers.

8. JOSH ROSEN, QB
UCLA

Rosen was inconsistent as a true freshman, but he is undoubtedly one of the most gifted quarterbacks in the nation. He threw for 300-plus yards six times and had three games in which he averaged at least 10.0 yards per passing attempt.

9. ROYCE FREEMAN, RB
OREGON

Freeman emerged as one of the most productive backs in the nation as a sophomore. The 5'11", 230-pound California native ranked fourth nationally in rushing with 141.2 yards per game on a healthy 6.5 yards per attempt. A run at the 2,000-yard mark is well within reach.

10. SETH RUSSELL, QB
BAYLOR

Russell was averaging 300.6 passing yards per game and leading the nation with 10.5 yards per attempt when he went down with a season-ending neck injury in late October. It must be noted that Baylor had faced only one team to that point that finished the year ranked in the top 100 in total defense (West Virginia, No. 61).

10 OTHERS TO WATCH

11. JOSHUA DOBBS, QB, Tennessee
12. JABRILL PEPPERS, LB/DB, Michigan
13. SAMAJE PERINE, RB, Oklahoma
14. NICK CHUBB, RB, Georgia
15. GREG WARD JR., QB, Houston
16. JUJU SMITH-SCHUSTER, WR, USC
17. PATRICK MAHOMES, QB, Texas Tech
18. CALVIN RIDLEY, WR, Alabama
19. BRAD KAAYA, QB, Miami
20. JALEN HURD, RB, Tennessee
21. DESHONE KIZER QB, Notre Dame
22. BO SCARBROUGH, RB, Alabama
23. SHOCK LINWOOD, RB, Baylor
24. WAYNE GALLMAN, RB, Clemson
25. JAKE BROWNING, QB, Washington

Tom DiPace

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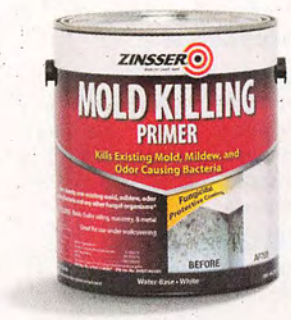

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COACHES ON THE HOT SEAT

1. CHARLIE STRONG
Texas (11–14, two seasons)

Strong's brief tenure in Austin has produced more losses than any two-year stretch at the school since 1955-56. There have been some bright spots — none brighter than last year's stunning win over Oklahoma — but Texas has looked alarmingly uncompetitive far too often. A strong 2015 recruiting class has quieted some critics, but Texas needs to deliver on the field.

2. DARRELL HAZELL
Purdue (6–30, three seasons)

Three of Hazell's six wins have come against FCS opponents, and the Boilermakers are a woeful 2–22 in the Big Ten in the past three seasons. It's hard to envision Hazell keeping his job unless Purdue reaches bowl-eligibility.

3. PAUL HAYNES
Kent State (9–26, three seasons)

Haynes inherited a program that went 8–0 in the MAC in 2012 but has managed only a 6–17 league record in the three years since. In 2015, the Golden Flashes ranked second-to-last in the nation in total offense (270.8 ypg) and last in the nation in both yards per play (4.11) and scoring offense (13.1 ppg).

4. GUS MALZAHN
Auburn (27–13, three seasons)

It might seem a bit odd to put a coach who played for a national championship in 2013 on a Hot Seat list in 2016, but this is quite normal at Auburn. Consider the cases of Tommy Tuberville and Gene Chizik. From 2000-07, Tuberville went 47–17 in the SEC, won or shared five SEC West titles and dominated rival Alabama (7–1). He was fired after going 5–7 in 2008. Chizik won a national championship in 2010 but was fired two seasons later. So that should explain why Malzahn, just 6–10 in league play in the past two seasons, is on less-than-solid footing entering his fourth season at Auburn.

5. TIM DERUYTER
Fresno State (29–23, four seasons)

DeRuyter went 20–6 overall and 15–2 in the Mountain West in his first two seasons, but the program has taken several steps back in the last two years. In 2015, the Bulldogs went 3–9, and all but one of the nine losses came by 14 points or more. DeRuyter fired offensive coordinator Dave Schramm and reassigned defensive coordinator Nick Toth.

6. DANA HOLGORSEN
West Virginia (36–28, five seasons)

There were reports that West Virginia considered dismissing Holgorsen after the Mountaineers lost to Kansas State in the 2015 regular-season finale. That, obviously, did not happen, but there's no denying that his job is far from secure. The Mountaineers have had a losing Big 12 record in three of four seasons and have only three Big 12 wins over teams that finished with a winning league record.

7. LES MILES
LSU (112–32, 11 seasons)

There was seemingly a 90 percent chance that Miles was going to be fired after the Tigers' final regular-season game, but the veteran coach received a stay of execution. Miles' record is extremely impressive, but he has lost five straight games to Alabama and has lost at least three games in four straight seasons — a record of "futility" that does not please the natives. Recruiting top players to LSU has not been a problem. Developing that talent, especially on offense, has been the issue.

GETTING WARM

RON CARAGHER, San Jose State
DAVE DOEREN, NC State
JAMES FRANKLIN, Penn State
PAUL JOHNSON, Georgia Tech
DEREK MASON, Vanderbilt
MIKE MACINTYRE, Colorado
MIKE RILEY, Nebraska
MARK STOOPS, Kentucky
KEVIN SUMLIN, Texas A&M
DOUG MARTIN, New Mexico State
RON TURNER, FIU

12 TOP COORDINATOR HIRES

1. DON BROWN, DC, MICHIGAN
Brown, a former head coach at UMass and Northeastern, did a superb job at Boston College. In 2015, the Eagles led the nation in total defense (254.3 ypg) and ranked fourth in scoring defense (15.3 ppg). Only two opponents gained more than 375 total yards — Clemson (532) and Notre Dame (447).

2. DAVE ARANDA, DC, LSU
Les Miles lost Kevin Steele to SEC West rival Auburn but rebounded nicely by luring Aranda to LSU with a lucrative three-year contract. Aranda has been a coordinator for six seasons at three schools (Wisconsin, Utah State and Hawaii), and his defenses have finished first in the conference twice, second twice, third once and fourth once.

3. BOB SHOOP, DC, TENNESSEE
Shoop made a name for himself on the national scene with his work as the defensive coordinator at Vanderbilt during James Franklin's successful three-year run in Nashville. He followed Franklin to Penn State but opted to return to the SEC following the 2015 season. Expectations are high for Shoop's defense.

4. JEREMY PRUITT, DC, ALABAMA
Ten years ago, Pruitt was the defensive coordinator at Hoover (Ala.) High School. Now, he is on his third stop as a defensive coordinator at an elite program. After a one-year stint at Florida State, where he won a national title in 2013, and two years at Georgia, Pruitt returns to his alma mater. He previously worked under Nick Saban as the director of player development (2007-09) and defensive backs coach (2010-12).

5. GREG SCHIANO, CO-DC, OHIO STATE
Schiano was the head coach at Rutgers from 2001-11 before making the jump to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. He was fired after the 2013 season and has been out of coaching until now. He served as defensive coordinator at the University of Miami (1999-2000).

6. JOE MOORHEAD, OC, PENN STATE
Moorhead was hired to resuscitate a Penn State offense that ranked 13th in the Big Ten in yards per game in each of James Franklin's first two seasons at the school. Moorhead has been the head coach at Fordham the past four seasons; in the last three, the Rams ranked 18th, seventh and seventh in total offense and advanced to the FCS playoffs. He has also been an offensive coordinator at UConn and Akron.

7. BRADY HOKE, DC, OREGON
Hoke compiled a cumulative record of 78–70 in 12 seasons as a head coach at Ball State, San Diego State and Michigan. This will be his first defensive coordinator post since the early 1980s, when he was the DC at Yorktown (Ind.) High School. This will not, however, be his first job as a college coach in Oregon; he was the defensive line coach at Oregon State from 1989-94.

8. TOM ALLEN, DC, INDIANA
Allen broke into the FBS ranks as an assistant to Hugh Freeze at Arkansas State (2011) and Ole Miss (2012-14). He was named the defensive coordinator at South Florida last season and helped the Bulls improve from eighth in the AAC in total defense in 2014 to fourth in '15. Allen is an Indiana native who coached high school football in the state from 1997 to 2006.

9. CHIP LINDSEY, OC, ARIZONA STATE
Lindsey has made a rapid ascent from high school coach (2012) to coordinator in a Power 5 conference. He did tremendous work in his two seasons as the OC at Southern Miss, helping the Golden Eagles improve their scoring average from 19.0 points per game in 2014 to 39.9 in '15.

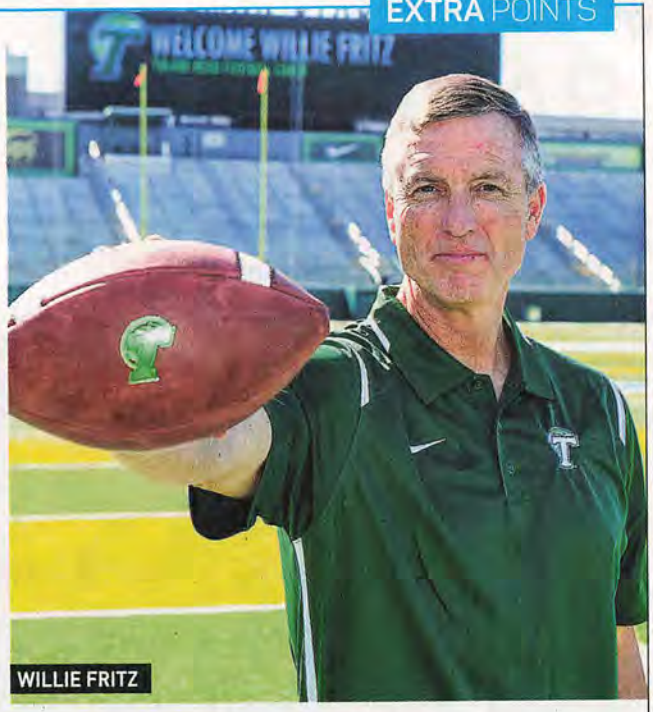
10. CLANCY PENDERGAST, DC, USC
Pendergast was the defensive coordinator at USC in 2013 under Lane Kiffin and interim coach Ed Orgeron before heading to the NFL for a one-year stint as the linebackers coach with the 49ers. Clay Helton, the new Trojans' head coach, hired Pendergast to run the defense once again.

11. WALT BELL, OC, MARYLAND
Bell arrives at Maryland after serving as the offensive coordinator at Arkansas State for two seasons. Under his watch, the Red Wolves ranked first or second in both total offense and scoring offense in both 2014 and '15. He previously worked for Larry Fedora at both Southern Miss and North Carolina.

12. KEVIN CLUNE, DC, OREGON STATE
Clune rejoins Oregon State head coach Gary Andersen, who he previously worked with at Utah, Southern Utah and Utah State. Last season, Clune's Utah State defense ranked third in the Mountain West, allowing only 332.5 yards per game. He's got his work cut out for him in Corvallis; the Beavers allowed 481.5 yards per game in 2015.

Tulane Athletics

COACHES ON THE RISE



WILLIE FRITZ

1. TOM HERMAN

head coach, Houston

Herman's "H-Town Takeover" and plan to elevate Houston as the top Group of 5 program is off to a fast start. In Year 1, Herman guided the Cougars to a 13–1 record, an American Athletic Conference title and a victory over Florida State in the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl. Winning at a high level is nothing new to Herman. He was the offensive coordinator at Ohio State from 2012-14 and was widely praised for keeping the Buckeyes' offense humming through several injuries at the quarterback position en route to winning a national title.

2. LINCOLN RILEY

offensive coordinator, Oklahoma

At 32 years old, Riley is one of the nation's youngest coordinators, and it's only a matter of time before he has a chance to run his own program. Riley was instrumental in Oklahoma's trip to the College Football Playoff last season. In his first year as the Sooners' play caller, Riley guided the offense to an average of 43.5 points per game and 6.8 yards per play. Both totals represented marked improvement from Oklahoma's 2014 numbers and propelled the Sooners to a three-game jump in the win column. Prior to last season at Oklahoma, Riley worked five seasons at East Carolina as the offensive coordinator and coached under Mike Leach at Texas Tech from 2006-09.

3. DAVE ARANDA

defensive coordinator, LSU

Aranda has been on a fast climb and has emerged as one of the nation's top defensive coordinators. The California native worked at a handful of programs before landing at Hawaii in 2008. Aranda's four years with the Rainbow Warriors caught the attention of Gary Andersen, who chose Aranda to run his defenses at Utah State and Wisconsin. During Aranda's three-year stint with the Badgers, Wisconsin never allowed more than 5.0 yards per play in a season and led the nation in scoring defense in 2015. Aranda has thrived at every stop and now has an opportunity to work with one of the nation's most-talented rosters at LSU.

4. WILLIE FRITZ

head coach, Tulane

Tulane is the toughest job in the American Athletic Conference, but the program took a major step forward by hiring Fritz away from Georgia Southern. In two years with the Eagles, Fritz went 17–7 and earned one bowl appearance while the program transitioned from the FCS level to FBS play. Success for Fritz isn't limited to just Georgia Southern. He won 39 games in four years at Blinn (Texas) College, posted 11 winning seasons at Central Missouri and guided Sam Houston State to back-to-back FCS Championship Game appearances.

5. MATT RHULE

head coach, Temple

Temple's football program suffered through 18 consecutive losing seasons from 1991-08 and was dismissed from the Big East in 2004. However, the perception of the program has significantly changed in recent years. Momentum is at an all-time high for the Owls after Rhule guided the 2015 team to 10 wins (tied for the most in school history), defeated Penn State for the first time since 1941 and climbed to No. 20 in the AP poll in late November.

6. P.J. FLECK

head coach, Western Michigan

Fleck is known for his energy and ability to attract talent to Western Michigan, but he's proven to be more than just an ace recruiter. After a 1–11 debut at WMU in 2013, Fleck led the Broncos to consecutive 8–5 seasons (2014-15) and claimed a share of the MAC West title last year. Western Michigan is also coming off back-to-back bowl games for the first time in program history. Fleck's stock should climb even higher in 2016, as the Broncos return 14 starters and are poised to challenge for their first outright conference title since 1988.

7. KENDAL BRILES

offensive coordinator, Baylor

Art Briles' coaching tree has expanded in recent years, and it's only a matter of time before his son Kendal gets a chance to run his own program. He's worked on Baylor's staff since 2008 and was promoted to play-caller before the 2015 Cotton Bowl against Michigan State. In Briles' first full season calling the plays, the Bears finished second nationally by averaging 7.3 yards per play and ranked first in scoring offense (48.1 ppg). Despite injuries taking a toll on Baylor's top three quarterbacks last year, the offense never missed a beat thanks to Briles' ability to adapt to the personnel.

8. JEFF BROHM

head coach, WKU

Brohm has deep roots in the state of Kentucky from his time as a quarterback at Louisville (1989-93) and as an assistant with the Cardinals from 2003-08. After two years at WKU, Brohm has emerged as one of the nation's top offensive coaches in the Group of 5 leagues and will be a prime target for job openings at Power 5 programs. The Hilltoppers are 20–7 under Brohm, including a Conference USA title and a No. 24 finish in the Associated Press poll in 2015. Brohm's play-calling and scheme are key reasons why WKU is one of only four programs to average at least 40 points in each of the last two years.

9. DOUG MEACHAM

co-offensive coordinator, TCU

Gary Patterson wasted no time making significant changes after his program struggled through a 4–8 record in 2013. Patterson hired Meacham after a successful one-year stint as Houston's play-caller, and the Texas native had an immediate impact on TCU's offense. After averaging just 25.1 points per game in 2013, the Horned Frogs finished second nationally (46.5 ppg) in Meacham's first year. The offense continued to perform at a high level last season, averaging 42.1 points per game and 6.8 yards per play.

10. SCOTT SATTERFIELD

head coach, Appalachian State

No coach is better suited than Satterfield for the top spot at Appalachian State. After serving as the Mountaineers quarterback from 1991-95, Satterfield joined Jerry Moore's staff in 1998 and remained in that role until 2009. After stints at Toledo and FIU, Satterfield worked for one year as the offensive coordinator (2012) and was named the program's head coach in 2013. In addition to replacing Moore — a coaching legend in the FCS ranks — Satterfield was tasked with moving Appalachian State to the FBS level. The Mountaineers went 4–8 in Satterfield's debut but are 18–7 over the last two years and recorded the program's first bowl trip in 2015.

RANKING 2015's NEW COACHES

JIM HARBAUGH

1. TOM HERMAN, HOUSTON
Before: 8-5 (5-3) After: 13-1 (7-1)
The Cougars went from good to great in Herman's first season. Led by dynamic quarterback Greg Ward Jr., Houston won a school-record 13 games, highlighted by wins over Louisville, Vanderbilt, Memphis, Navy, Temple and Florida State. Its only loss, 20-17 at UConn, occurred while Ward was sidelined with an ankle injury.

2. JIM HARBAUGH, MICHIGAN
Before: 5-7 (3-5) After: 10-3 (6-2)
Big things were expected in Harbaugh's homecoming — and the former Michigan quarterback delivered. The Wolverines improved their win total by five games thanks in large part to a defense that allowed 17 points or fewer in eight of 13 games. Offensively, Michigan improved from 333.0 yards per game in 2014 to 395.9 last fall.

3. JIM MCELWAIN, FLORIDA
Before: 7-5 (4-4) After: 10-4 (7-1)
The Gators limped to the finish after starting quarterback Will Grier was lost for the season with a suspension, but this is still a team that improved its win total by three games (both overall and in league play) and captured the SEC East title. The offense, however, was brutal in the second half of the season; Florida had fewer than 275 yards in five of its final six games.

4. PAT NARDUZZI, PITTSBURGH
Before: 6-7 (4-4) After: 8-5 (6-2)
The Panthers' stats on a per-game basis, both offensively and defensively, were actually down a bit in Narduzzi's first season, but their ACC record improved from 4-4 to 6-2 because they found ways to win close games. In 2014, Pitt went 1-3 in ACC games decided by five points or fewer; last season, four of its six league wins were by seven points or fewer.

5. PHILIP MONTGOMERY, TULSA
Before: 2-10 (2-6) After: 6-7 (3-5)
The Golden Hurricane feasted on the underbelly of the AAC — their three league wins came against Tulane, UCF and SMU — and a soft non-conference schedule to reach bowl-eligibility for the first time since 2012. Still, Montgomery, a long-time Art Briles assistant, deserves credit for returning this once-proud program to relevance. Tulsa won more games in 2015 than in the previous two seasons combined.

6. PAUL CHRYST, WISCONSIN
Before: 11-3 (7-1) After: 10-3 (6-2)
Chryst returned to his alma mater after a three-year stint at Pittsburgh and guided the Badgers to a 10-3 record that amazingly did not include a win over a team with a winning record in the regular season. In very un-Wisconsin-like fashion, the Badgers ranked higher in the Big Ten in passing (seventh, 228.3 ypg) than rushing (10th, 150.3 ypg).

7. JOHN BONAMEGO, CENTRAL MICHIGAN
Before: 7-6 (5-3) After: 7-6 (6-2)
Bonamego, who spent the previous 16 years as a special teams coach in the NFL, was a curious hire, but the former wide receiver and quarter-

Harbaugh: Tom Lynn; McElwain: Tom DiPace; Beaty: Tim Umphrey

JIM MCELWAIN

DAVID BEATY

back at Central Michigan did a solid job in his first season as the head coach at his alma mater. The Chips went 6–2 in the MAC — their best record since 2009 — with both league losses coming by five points or fewer.

8. MIKE BOBO, COLORADO STATE

Before: 10–3 (6–2) After: 7–6 (5–3)

The Rams took a step back in the win column, but Bobo did a nice job in his first season as a head coach — especially when you consider that he had to replace Garrett Grayson, the school's all-time passing leader, and standout running back Dee Hart. Colorado State lost five games in the regular season — two in overtime vs. Power 5 teams (Minnesota and Colorado) and three against Mountain West heavyweights (Utah State, Boise State and San Diego State).

9. MIKE RILEY, NEBRASKA

Before: 9–4 (5–3) After: 6–7 (3–5)

The first year of the Mike Riley era ended on a positive note — a win over UCLA in the Foster Farms Bowl — but it was a bumpy ride for the veteran coach. The Cornhuskers' first five losses came by five points or fewer, including the first three on the opponent's final offensive play from scrimmage. They played better late, with wins over Michigan State, Rutgers and UCLA sandwiched around a 28–20 loss to Iowa.

10. NEAL BROWN, TROY

Before: 3–9 (3–5) After: 4–8 (3–5)

Troy's 2015 season looked very similar to the final year of Larry Blakeney's tenure, though the Trojans did beat Sun Belt rival Louisiana-Lafayette for the first time since 2010. Hopes are high for a quick turnaround in 2016.

11. TONY SANCHEZ, UNLV

Before: 2–11 (1–7) After: 3–9 (2–6)

Sanchez was the first coach to make the jump from high school to the FBS ranks since 2007. The Runnin' Rebels had a modest one-game improvement in the win column, but they were far more competitive in 2015. Their margin of defeat was a respectable 5.1 points per game, down from 16.6 in Bobby Hauck's final season.

12. LANCE LEIPOLD, BUFFALO

Before: 5–6 (3–4) After: 5–7 (3–5)

Leipold lost more games last season at Buffalo than he did in his eight-year stint at Division III powerhouse Wisconsin-Whitewater. The Bulls appeared to be on the verge of bowl-eligibility after beating Kent State to improve to 5–4, but they ended the season with consecutive losses to Northern Illinois, Akron and UMass.

13. GARY ANDERSEN, OREGON STATE

Before: 5–7 (2–7) After: 2–10 (0–9)

Andersen shocked the college football world when he left Wisconsin after two seasons to take the job at Oregon State. And the results were not pretty. The Beavers went winless in league play for the first time since 1997, and only two of their nine Pac-12 defeats came by fewer than 15 points.

14. CHAD MORRIS, SMU

Before: 1–11 (1–7) After: 2–10 (1–7)

It was a difficult first season for Morris, a former high school coach in Texas and a highly respected offensive coordinator at Tulsa and Clemson. The Mustangs' offense showed significant improvement, but the defense was among the worst in the nation and was the primary reason SMU won only two games.

15. DAVID BEATY, KANSAS

Before: 3–9 (1–8)
After: 0–12 (0–9)

It didn't seem possible, but Kansas took a big step back in 2015. The season began with a 41–38 loss at home to FCS foe South Dakota State and ended with a 45–14 defeat to Kansas State. The Jayhawks went winless for the first time since 1954 and were outgained in league games by a staggering 266.9 yards per game — by far the most by any team in any league in college football.

2016 COACHING CAROUSEL

A total of 28 programs changed hands in a busy offseason. Here's how we ranked the new hires

1. **JUSTIN FUENTE,** VIRGINIA TECH
2. **WILLIE FRITZ,** TULANE
3. **MARK RICHT,** MIAMI (FLA.)
4. **MATT CAMPBELL,** IOWA STATE
5. **DINO BABERS,** SYRACUSE
6. **MIKE NORVELL,** MEMPHIS
7. **D.J. DURKIN,** MARYLAND
8. **BARRY ODOM,** MISSOURI
9. **BRONCO MENDENHALL,** VIRGINIA
10. **KIRBY SMART,** GEORGIA
11. **LOVIE SMITH,** ILLINOIS
12. **SCOTT FROST,** UCF
13. **JASON CANDLE,** TOLEDO
14. **SETH LITTRELL,** NORTH TEXAS
15. **MATT VIATOR,** ULM
16. **KALANI SITAKE,** BYU
17. **JAY HOPSON,** SOUTHERN MISS
18. **NICK ROLOVICH,** HAWAII
19. **CHRIS ASH,** RUTGERS
20. **EVERETT WITHERS,** TEXAS STATE
21. **SCOTTIE MONTGOMERY,** EAST CAROLINA
22. **TYSON SUMMERS,** GEORGIA SOUTHERN
23. **CLAY HELTON,** USC
24. **WILL MUSCHAMP,** SOUTH CAROLINA
25. **TRACY CLAEYS,** MINNESOTA
26. **FRANK WILSON,** UTSA
27. **MIKE NEU,** BALL STATE
28. **MIKE JINKS,** BOWLING GREEN

QB *TRANSFERS*

TREVOR KNIGHT

AUSTIN APPLEBY
Purdue to Florida

Appleby started seven games in 2014 and three games last season before being benched. His supporting cast shares blame, but Appleby's numbers at Purdue were not good; over the last two years, he completed only 54.9 percent of his passes, averaged 5.7 yards per attempt and threw more interceptions (19) than touchdowns (18).

FATON BAUTA
Georgia to Colorado State

Bauta played sparingly in his four years at Georgia, though he did earn a start against Florida last fall. He completed 15-of-33 passes for 154 yards with no touchdowns and four interceptions in the Bulldogs' 27–3 loss. Bauta was recruited to Georgia by current Colorado State head coach Mike Bobo. He is a graduate transfer who has one season of eligibility.

LUKE DEL RIO
Oregon State to Florida

The son of Oakland Raiders head coach Jack Del Rio began his career as a walk-on at Alabama before transferring to Oregon State after the 2013 season. He played in three games in 2014 for the Beavers, completing 8-of-18 for 141 yards. He has two years of eligibility.

TYLER FERGUSON
Louisville to WKU

The well-traveled Ferguson is at his fourth school in five seasons after stops in junior college (2012), Penn State (2013) and Louisville (2014). He intended to sign with WKU to play for Bobby Petrino after leaving Penn State but followed Petrino to Louisville after the coaching move. He and USF transfer Mike White are the top two candidates to replace Brandon Doughty at quarterback.

DARELL GARRETSON
Utah State to Oregon State

Garretson filled in for the oft-injured Chuckie Keeton in 2013-14, playing in a combined 13 games and making seven starts (all in 2013). In '13, he completed over 60 percent of his passes with 10 touchdowns and seven interceptions. He will battle sophomore Marcus McMaryion for the starting assignment in 2016.

KENNY HILL
Texas A&M to TCU

In his first career start, Hill threw for 511 yards and three touchdowns in Texas A&M's 52–28 win at South Carolina in Week 1 of the 2014 season. He proceeded to throw for at least 300 yards four more times over the next seven games but lost his job to true freshman Kyle Allen after the Aggies lost three straight games in October. He is expected to start at TCU and will have two seasons of eligibility.

TREVOR KNIGHT
Oklahoma to Texas A&M

Knight was never able to replicate his magical performance against Alabama in the Sugar Bowl in January 2014. He started 10 games in 2014 as a sophomore but completed only 56.6 percent of his passes and had a less-than-ideal TD-to-INT ratio of 14-to-12. He was relegated to backup duties in 2015 after Baker Mayfield won the job in preseason camp. Knight is expected to start at A&M, which lost both Kyle Allen and Kyler Murray to offseason transfers.

ALEC MORRIS
Alabama to North Texas

Morris, a native of Allen, Texas, will play his final season of eligibility at North Texas under first-year coach Seth Littrell. He threw one pass during his four seasons at Alabama.

JOHN O'KORN
Houston to Michigan

O'Korn emerged as the starter at Houston in Week 3 of his true freshman season and threw for 3,117 yards and 28 touchdowns in his rookie campaign. He started the first five games of his sophomore season but lost his job to Greg Ward Jr. He is the early favorite to replace Jake Rudock at Michigan in 2016 but will have to fend off several other strong candidates.

DAKOTA PRUKOP
Montana State to Oregon

Oregon is going back to the FCS grad transfer well once again after enjoying great success with Vernon Adams last season. Prukop accumulated 3,822 yards of total offense in 2015 at Montana State and set a single-season school record with 39 total touchdowns. Prukop graduated from MSU in December and enrolled at Oregon in the spring semester.

PATRICK TOWLES
Kentucky to Boston College

Towles started 22 straight games for Kentucky but was benched for the final two games of the 2015 season. After a relatively strong 2014 season (2,718 yards passing, 14 TDs, nine INTs), the Kentucky native regressed as a junior in '15, throwing nine TDs and 14 interceptions. He is penciled in as the starter for a Boston College offense that struggled mightily in 2015.

RICKY TOWN
USC to Arkansas

Town, a Southern California native and one-time Alabama commitment, bolted USC after one semester. The former highly rated recruit will battle Austin Allen, the brother of three-year starter Brandon Allen, for the top job in preseason camp. He will have four years of eligibility.

CHAD VOYTIK
Pittsburgh to TBD

Voytik was solid in his only season as the starter at Pittsburgh, completing 61.3 percent of his passes with 16 touchdowns and seven interceptions as a sophomore in 2014. He lost his job early last season to Tennessee transfer Nathan Peterman and will play his final season elsewhere in 2016 as a graduate transfer.

DAVIS WEBB
Texas Tech to TBD

Webb enjoyed two productive seasons as the primary quarterback (14 starts) at Texas Tech but was beaten out last fall by Patrick Mahomes. He initially announced his intention to transfer to Colorado but visited several other schools in the spring and had yet to finalize a decision as of late April.

MIKE WHITE
USF to WKU

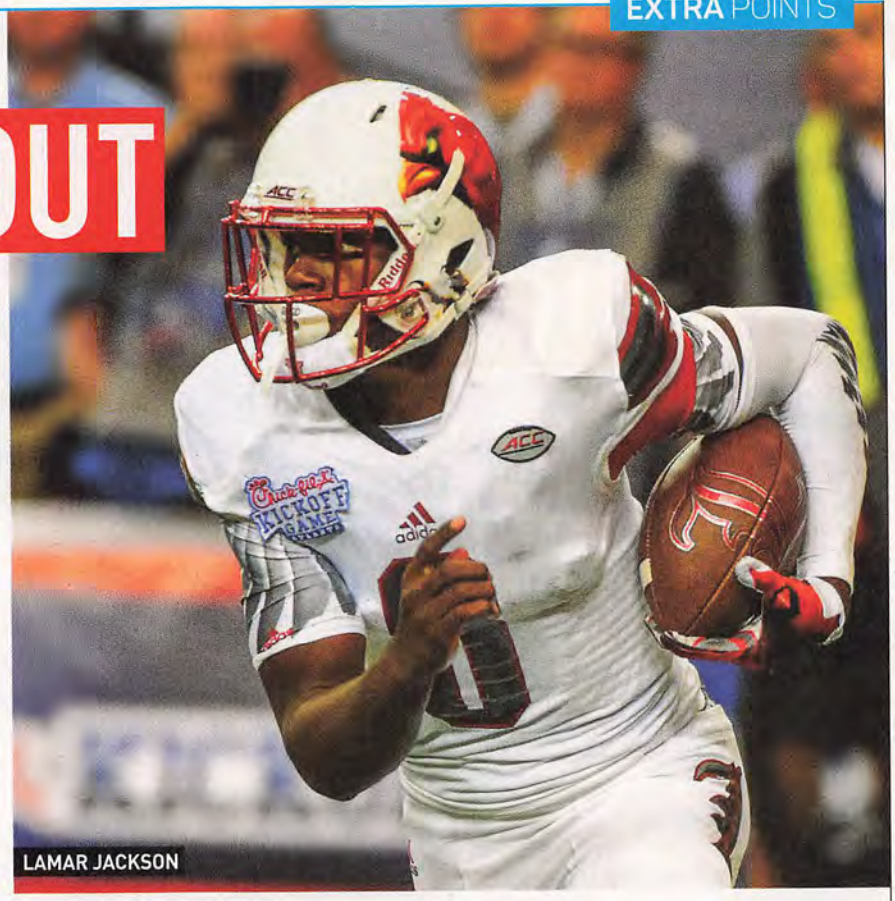
White, who started 15 games in his first two seasons at USF, left the program in March 2015 when it became clear he was not in the Bulls' long-term plans. He will have two seasons of eligibility at WKU, where he will battle fellow transfer Tyler Ferguson for the job.

OTHER TRANSFERS OF NOTE

MICHAEL BARTON, LB, California to Arizona
CHRIS BLACK, WR, Alabama to Missouri
TYLER CATALINA, OL, Rhode Island to Georgia
ANTONIO CRAWFORD, CB, Miami (Fla.) to West Virginia
GEHRIG DIETER, WR, Bowling Green to Alabama
KEITH FORD, RB, Oklahoma to Texas A&M
DARIUS JAMES, OL, Texas to Auburn
GENO LEWIS, WR, Penn State to Oklahoma
T.J. NEAL, LB, Illinois to Auburn
ONDRE PIPKINS, DT, Michigan to Texas Tech
JAKE RAULERSON, OL, Texas to UCLA
RA'SHAAD SAMPLES, WR, Oklahoma State to Houston
BARRY SANDERS, RB, Stanford to Oklahoma State
GERALD WILLIS, DL, Florida to Miami (Fla.)
PRIEST WILLIS, DB, UCLA to Texas A&M

Knight: 12thMan.com; Jackson: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 BREAKOUT PLAYERS


LAMAR JACKSON

JAKE BROWNING
QB, WASHINGTON

Browning's development is a big reason why Washington is expected to challenge for the Pac-12 title in 2016. As a true freshman last year, he started 12 games and threw for 2,955 yards and 16 scores.

SAM HUBBARD
DE, OHIO STATE

With Joey Bosa off to the NFL, Hubbard is poised to build off a promising redshirt freshman season. In 13 games and limited snaps, Hubbard recorded 6.5 sacks and ranked fourth on the team with eight tackles for a loss.

LAMAR JACKSON
QB, LOUISVILLE

After two seasons of uncertainty at quarterback, Louisville has found its answer under center. Jackson is still developing as a passer, but the sophomore is a dynamic playmaker. He accounted for 2,800 total yards and 23 overall scores last season.

CECE JEFFERSON
DE, FLORIDA

Jefferson was one of the cornerstones of Jim McElwain's first signing class at Florida, and the sophomore is expected to fill the void left behind by Jonathan Bullard's departure to the NFL. Jefferson recorded 29 tackles (8.5 for a loss) and 3.5 sacks in limited snaps last year.

RONALD JONES
RB, USC

Jones was one of the top recruits in USC's 2015 signing class, and the Texas native wasted no time making an impact. He led the team with 987 yards and eight rushing scores and is slated for more carries in 2016 after recording only 153 attempts last year.

ARDEN KEY
DE, LSU

New coordinator Dave Aranda plans to utilize Key as a hybrid end/linebacker this season. The Georgia native should thrive in that role, as he recorded five sacks and 6.5 tackles for a loss as a true freshman in 2015. Key is already one of the SEC's top pass rushers.

DAYLON MACK
DT, TEXAS A&M

Texas A&M's rush defense finished 13th in the SEC last season, but help is on the way from a former five-star recruit. Mack made an instant impact as a true freshman in 2015, recording 32 tackles (9.5 for a loss) and one forced fumble. He's slated to move into a starting role this season.

BO SCARBROUGH
RB, ALABAMA

Replacing standout running backs seems to be an annual tradition in Tuscaloosa. Scarbrough is the next star on the ground for coach Nick Saban and is primed to take over the starting job after recording 104 yards and one score on 18 carries last year.

LJ SCOTT, RB
MICHIGAN STATE

With quarterback Connor Cook departing, the focus of Michigan State's offense shifts to the ground attack. Scott led the Spartans with 699 yards and 11 scores as a true freshman last year and is expected to shoulder more of the workload in 2016.

JEREMY SPRINKLE
TE, ARKANSAS

Hunter Henry will be missed, but the Razorbacks already have a capable replacement waiting in the wings. Sprinkle caught 27 passes for 389 yards and six scores last year and will be a safety valve for Arkansas' new quarterback.

JOSH SWEAT
DE, FLORIDA STATE

Sweat suffered a serious leg injury as a high school senior but managed to recover in time to play in all 13 games as a true freshman. The Virginia native showed flashes of dominance off the edge, recording 41 tackles (five for a loss), two sacks and one interception.

SOLOMON THOMAS
DL, STANFORD

The defensive line is one of coach David Shaw's biggest concerns in 2016. But this unit should get a boost from the emergence of Thomas, who recorded 39 tackles (10.5 for a loss) and 3.5 sacks as a redshirt freshman last season.

MITCH TRUBISKY
QB, NORTH CAROLINA

Marquise Williams departs after earning second-team All-ACC honors, but there's not much concern at quarterback for the Tar Heels. Trubisky has passed for 1,014 yards and 11 scores over 21 career appearances.

CHRISTIAN WILKINS
DL, CLEMSON

Clemson has some holes to fill up front, but the cupboard isn't bare for coordinator Brent Venables. Wilkins is one of the next standouts in the trenches for the Tigers after playing in all 15 games as a true freshman last fall and recording 33 tackles and two sacks.

CONNOR WILLIAMS
OT, TEXAS

Williams is one of the anchors for Charlie Strong's rebuilding effort on offense. The Texas native started all 12 games at left tackle as a true freshman last season and earned honorable mention All-Big 12 honors.

BACK FROM INJURY

DANTE BARNETT

OTARO ALAKA
LB, TEXAS A&M
Came on strong at the end of his true freshman season in 2014, starting the final five games and earning Defensive MVP honors of the AutoZone Liberty Bowl. He was limited to three games in 2015 due to a shoulder injury.

DANTE BARNETT
S, KANSAS STATE
A second-team All-Big 12 selection as a junior in 2014, Barnett went down with an injury in a Week 1 win over South Dakota and did not play the rest of the season. He will be a fifth-year senior in 2016.

HAROLD BRANTLEY
DT, MISSOURI
Missed the entire 2015 season due to injuries sustained in a car accident. As a sophomore, he earned honorable mention All-SEC after recording 54 tackles and 5.0 sacks.

PHARAOH BROWN
TE, OREGON
Brown missed the final five games of 2014 and all of last season after suffering a gruesome leg injury in a win at Utah in November 2014. Before his injury, he caught 25 passes for 420 yards and six touchdowns.

HAROLD BRANTLEY

NICK CHUBB
RB, GEORGIA
One of the nation's elite running backs, Chubb was sidelined with a torn ACL against Tennessee in October. Through the first five games, he rushed for 747 yards on an 8.1-yard average. Georgia is optimistic Chubb will be ready to go in Week 1.

COREY CLEMENT
RB, WISCONSIN
Clement was expected to be the next great running back at Wisconsin, but a groin injury limited him to 48 rushing attempts in four games in 2015. He averaged only 4.6 yards per carry after averaging 6.5 as a sophomore and 8.2 as a freshman.

JAMES CONNER
RB, PITTSBURGH
Conner rushed for 1,765 yards and 26 touchdowns during a spectacular sophomore season in 2014 but went down with a torn ACL in the opener last September. Then in December he announced he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. His recovery was going well in the spring, and the hope is that he will be back in action in 2016.

ED DAVIS
LB, MICHIGAN STATE
An honorable mention All-Big Ten pick as a junior in 2014, Davis has been granted a sixth season of eligibility by the NCAA and is expected to start at strong-side linebacker.

TAREAN FOLSTON
RB, NOTRE DAME
The Fighting Irish's leading rusher in 2014 with 889 yards, Folston missed all but one game last year with a torn ACL. He is back and will be the No. 1 back on a Notre Dame team that figures to lean on the run in 2016.

DARIUS HAMILTON
DT, RUTGERS
Started 13 games at defensive tackle as a junior in 2014 but played in only one game last fall due to a knee injury. He will be an important part of the Rutgers defense in Chris Ash's first season.

TAYSOM HILL
QB, BYU
The Cougars opened the 2015 season with a thrilling win at Nebraska in Week 1, but they lost their starting quarterback to a foot injury. It was the third time Hill's season had been cut short to injury. He has returned but will have to fight sophomore Tanner Mangum for playing time.

JARRON JONES
DT, NOTRE DAME
Started 11 games as a junior in 2014 and was expected to start last fall but suffered an MCL injury during fall camp. Could have a huge season.

JAMES MCFARLAND
DE, TCU
McFarland started six games at defensive end in 2014 and was the Defensive MVP of the Horned Frogs' Chick-fil-A Bowl rout of Ole Miss. He missed last season with a foot injury.

FABIAN MOREAU
DB, UCLA
Moreau, a two-year starter and a second-team All-Pac-12 pick in 2014, broke a bone in his foot in Week 3. Now a senior, the cornerback will be expected to be a key cog on the much-improved UCLA defense.

HARRISON PHILLIPS
DL, STANFORD
Nebraska native was expected to be key player on the Stanford defensive line but went down with a torn ACL in the opener against Northwestern. Phillips can play both end and tackle.

JOHN ROSS
WR/CB, WASHINGTON
Started seven games in 2014, three at wide receiver and four at cornerback, and also made his mark on special teams. Scored seven total touchdowns in 2014, from 91, 20, 55, 75, 86, 100 and 96 yards — an average of 75 per play.

SETH RUSSELL
QB, BAYLOR
Russell was on his way to a monster junior season before injuring his neck in a win over Iowa State in late October. He has fully recovered and will be the trigger man for the Bears' attack.

EDDIE VANDERDOES
DL, UCLA
Former top recruit suffered a torn ACL in the 2015 opener. He's a junior eligibility-wise but is likely to head to the NFL after the '16 season.

MIKE WILLIAMS
WR, CLEMSON
One of the most explosive players in the nation, Williams went down with a season-ending neck injury in Week 1. The 6'4" South Carolina native averaged 18.1 yards per reception in 2014.

MALIK ZAIRE
QB NOTRE DAME
Zaire took the helm last fall after Everett Golson transferred to Florida State. Two weeks into the season, however, he suffered a season-ending ankle injury. Zaire will battle sophomore DeShone Kizer in what figures to be one of the nation's most intriguing QB competitions.

Barnett: Tim Umphrey; Brantley: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports; Ward: Houston Athletics

TOP 20 GROUP OF 5 PLAYERS

GREG WARD

1. GREG WARD
QB, HOUSTON
Ward thrived under new coach Tom Herman and emerged as one of the nation's top quarterbacks last season. Ward went 13–0 as Houston's starter and accounted for 3,936 yards and 38 overall scores in 2015.

2. DAMONTAE KAZEE
CB, SAN DIEGO STATE
Kazee nearly jumped to the NFL a year early, but the lockdown cover corner decided to return for his senior season. He has earned All-Mountain West honors in each of the last two years.

3. TREY HENDRICKSON
DE, FAU
Hendrickson ranks third among active defenders with 20 career sacks and earned first-team All-Conference USA honors after recording 13.5 sacks and one forced fumble in 2015.

4. NICK MULLENS
QB, SOUTHERN MISS
Former coach Todd Monken played a big role in developing Mullens into Conference USA's top quarterback. The senior needs just 2,171 passing yards in 2016 to set a new school career passing mark.

5. MATT BREIDA
RB, GEORGIA SOUTHERN
Breida is a big reason why Georgia Southern led the nation in rushing offense over the last two years. He's accumulated 3,093 rushing yards and 13 rushes of 50 yards or more in that span.

6. COREY DAVIS
WR, WESTERN MICHIGAN
Davis is the only returning receiver with back-to-back 1,000-yard campaigns in 2016. In three years at Western Michigan, Davis has caught 235 passes for 3,785 yards and 33 scores.

7. JAMAR SUMMERS
CB, UCONN
The emergence of Summers as one of the nation's top cover men helped UConn's secondary rank 24th nationally in pass efficiency defense last season.

8. JA'VON ROLLAND-JONES
DL, ARKANSAS STATE
An injury limited Rolland-Jones to 10 games in his freshman season, but he returned at full strength last year and earned second-team All-Sun Belt honors after recording 8.5 sacks.

9. SHAWUN LURRY
CB, NORTHERN ILLINOIS
Not many players had a better first year as a starter than Lurry in 2015. The Florida native was a finalist for the Jim Thorpe Award after leading the nation with nine interceptions.

10. DONNEL PUMPHREY
RB, SAN DIEGO STATE
Pumphrey is the reigning Mountain West Offensive Player of the Year and has posted back-to-back 1,000-yard campaigns.

11. KAREEM HUNT
RB, TOLEDO
Injuries and an early season suspension prevented Hunt from building off a monster 2014 season (1,631 yards). The senior finished 2015 with 973 yards and ranks second among active players in career rushing yardage.

12. LARRY ROSE III
RB, NEW MEXICO STATE
In just two seasons in Las Cruces, Rose has recorded 2,753 rushing yards and needs just 1,940 yards to set a new New Mexico State career record.

13. BRIAN HILL
RB, WYOMING
Despite a sluggish Wyoming passing attack and defenses loading the box to stop the run, Hill rushed for 1,631 yards and six scores in 12 games last season.

14. JEREMY MCNICHOLS
RB, BOISE STATE
McNichols is the next in the long line of standouts for Boise State at running back. In his first full year as a starter, McNichols accounted for 1,797 yards and 26 total scores.

15. BRENT STOCKSTILL
QB, MTSU
After throwing for 4,005 yards and 30 scores as a redshirt freshman, Stockstill — the son of the Blue Raiders' head coach — is poised to take another step in his development and help Middle Tennessee contend for a Conference USA title.

16. BRETT RYPIEN
QB, BOISE STATE
It was only a matter of time before Rypien became a star at Boise State. He stepped into the starting lineup last year after an injury sidelined Ryan Finley and threw for 3,350 yards and 20 scores.

17. CALVIN MUNSON
LB, SAN DIEGO STATE
Munson has led the Aztecs in tackles for a loss in each of the last two years and finished second among Mountain West defenders with 9.5 sacks in 2015.

18. TAYWAN TAYLOR
WR, WKU
Quarterback Brandon Doughty has moved on to the NFL, but there's plenty of firepower in the Hilltoppers' high-powered offense. Taylor is an emerging NFL prospect after catching 86 passes for 1,467 yards and 17 scores in 2015.

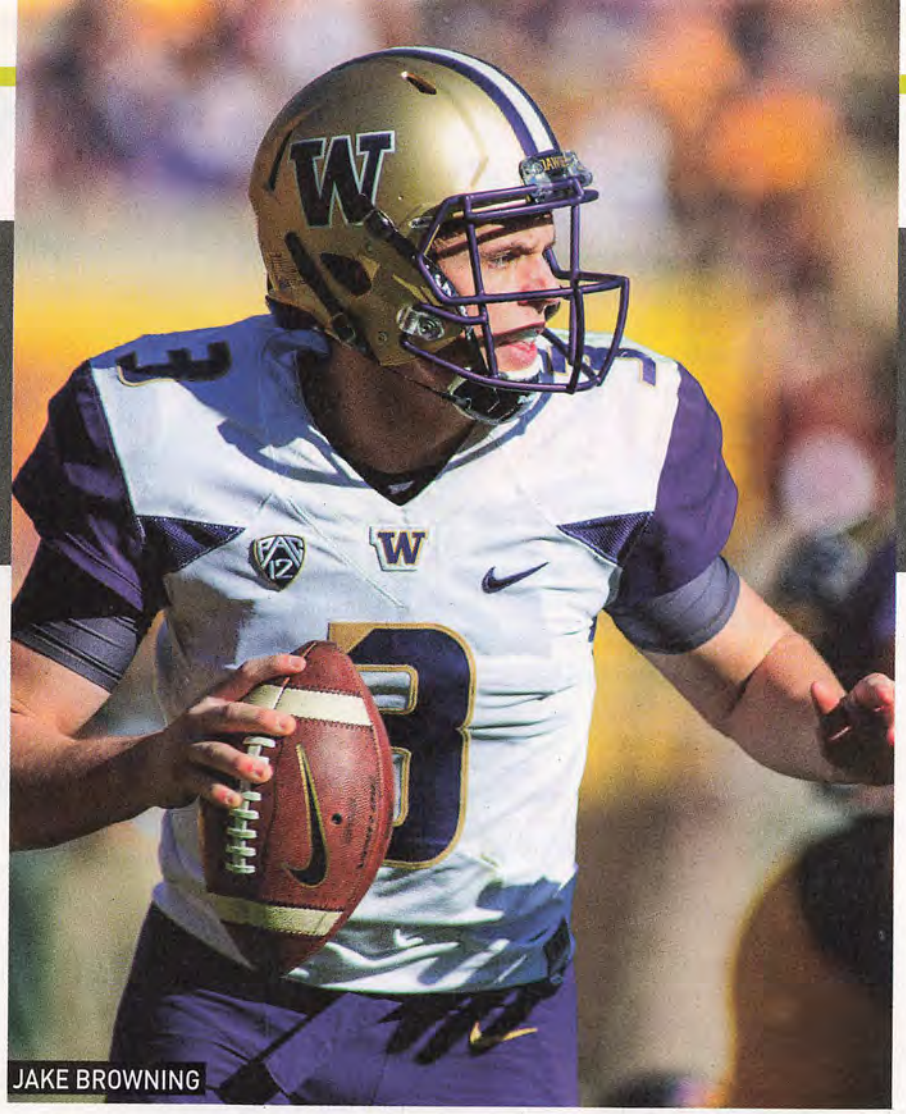
19. MARLON MACK
RB, USF
Mack led all American Athletic Conference players with 1,381 rushing yards last season and eclipsed 100 yards in nine out of 12 appearances.

20. STEVEN TAYLOR
LB, HOUSTON
Taylor anchors a stout front seven in 2016 after recording 92 tackles (18.5 for a loss), 10 sacks and two forced fumbles last year.

TEAMS ON THE RISE

Analytics Can Tell Us Which Teams Are Poised to Surprise in 2016

BY BILL CONNELLY


JAKE BROWNING

Stats and eyeballs frequently agree. According to last year's Massey Composite Ratings — a cumulative set of almost every college football computer ranking known to man — Alabama finished first, Clemson second and Ohio State third. To anybody who actually watched college football games in 2015, this sounds about right, just as it seemed right that some combination of Charlotte, UCF, Eastern Michigan, North Texas, ULM, Hawaii and Kansas would rank at the bottom.

Outside of the extremes, however, the math and the eyes may begin to see things differently, especially when you boil things down to a single formula (or set of formulas).

I have been maintaining the S&P+ ratings at FootballOutsiders.com since 2008. They represent an attempt to dig down to a level few computer ratings go, deriving efficiency and explosiveness from the play-by-play level. They combine aspects of football that affect college football's Five Factors — efficiency, explosiveness, field position, finishing drives and turnovers — into a single, opponent-adjusted number.

This system of ratings attempts to derive value from every play and drive of a given game (filtering out garbage time), and it watches every game, so to speak. We probably do not.

S&P+ saw the game the same way you did at the top: Alabama was first, Clemson second and Ohio State third. But as was customary, there were some more antisocial results beneath the top layer. Western Kentucky ranked in the top 15, for instance. Iowa and Northwestern, a combined 22–5, both fell out of the top 40 with blowout bowl losses.

Each year, S&P+ produces results that make you doubt its creator's sanity. But if you know what you are looking for, a system like this can be very useful. Among other things, it can drop pretty strong hints regarding who's about to have a really good, or really poor, season.

In 2007, Urban Meyer's Florida Gators went 9–4 thanks to three gut-wrenching losses but ranked third. The next year, they won the national title.

In 2009, Oklahoma fell from the BCS title game to a ho-hum 8–5, but the Sooners still graded out sixth in S&P+. They went 12–2 the next year.

In 2011, Notre Dame went 8–5 and ranked 11th while Texas A&M ranked eighth but blew a ton of leads and went 7–6. The next year, the two teams went a combined 23–3, with the Irish reaching the BCS title game and the Aggies taking home a Heisman (Johnny Manziel) and a win over Alabama.

You get the idea. What might seem like strange rankings could be reminders that the college football season is a small-sample exercise.

With that in mind, let's look at teams who may have either looked out of place in the 2015 rankings or might be due to surprise in 2016.

2015 S&P+ RANKINGS

S&P+ Rk	Team (Ranking)
1	Alabama (14-1)
2	Clemson (14-1)
3	Ohio State (12-1)
4	Oklahoma (11-2)
5	Ole Miss (10-3)
6	Michigan (10-3)
7	Florida State (10-3)
8	Notre Dame (10-3)
9	LSU (9-3)
10	Stanford (12-2)
11	Western Kentucky (12-2)
12	Washington (7-6)
13	Michigan State (12-2)
14	Baylor (10-3)
15	Arkansas (8-5)
16	Mississippi State (9-4)
17	USC (8-6)
18	Florida (10-4)
19	Bowling Green (10-4)
20	Navy (11-2)

Browning: Peter Brouillet; Westerkamp: Tim Umphrey

WASHINGTON

From a quality perspective, Washington has already broken through. We're simply waiting on the results to follow. In this way, the Huskies are this year's Arkansas.

In 2014, Arkansas played mostly awesome football. The Razorbacks ranked a staggering fifth in S&P+ thanks to the dominance of their wins — they didn't just beat Nicholls State, they beat the Colonels by 66. They beat Northern Illinois by 38, Ole Miss by 30, UAB by 28, Texas by 24, Texas Tech by 21 and LSU by 17. And since S&P+ filters out garbage time results, they didn't get any extra credit for running up the score.

Proving you're capable of results like that is a good way to get computers to like you. So is losing to good teams by small margins. The Hogs fell to Alabama by one and to Missouri, Texas A&M and Mississippi State by seven points each, suffering some bad breaks along the way.

Washington didn't rank fifth like Arkansas last year, but the Huskies ranked a healthy 12th. They suffered competitive losses to solid Oregon and Boise State teams and faded late in losses to Utah and Arizona State. More important, they looked like world beaters in wins. They beat USC in the Coliseum, and crushed Arizona, Oregon State, and Washington State by an average score of 49–7.

More than anything else, advanced stats tell us what would happen if we weren't so reliant on single-game outcomes. If football teams played a 30- or 82- or 162-game schedule, the teams most capable of dominance would likely be the ones who won the most. But with only 12 games, we can get distracted.

Washington showed immense upside in 2015 and did so with an absurdly young team. The Huskies listed 56 players on their two-deep for the Heart of Dallas Bowl — 27 on offense and 29 on defense. A whopping 35 of them were either true freshmen, redshirt freshmen or sophomores. Only 10 were seniors.

On average, you tend to take your biggest developmental leaps within your first couple of years in the program. So a majority of last year's two-deep can expect to take a step or to forward, and very few difference makers are gone. And again, this was already a good team last year.

If you pay attention only to wins and losses, you may be a little bit confused by the Washington hype. Sure, the Huskies beat USC and looked good in their bowl win, but really? Pac-12 North favorites? Beneath the surface, though, the Huskies were far better than your typical 7–6 team, and they were incredibly young as well.

Of course, you still have to learn how to win. For as good as Arkansas may have been on paper, the Razorbacks still only improved from 7–6 to 8–5 in 2015 because of a slow start to the season. The same close-loss symptoms that held them back the previous fall bit them against Toledo, Texas Tech and Texas A&M during a 1–3 start. But they very much looked the part down the stretch, beating Ole Miss and LSU on the road and whipping Missouri and Kansas State to end the year and managing another top-15 S&P+ finish in 2015.

For all we know, the record won't show it with Washington, either. But you should really keep an eye on this exciting Huskies team, just in case.

JORDAN WESTERKAMP

NEBRASKA

Turnovers luck can make such a difference in a short season. While we expect the bounces to even out over time, 12 games isn't a long enough span for that to happen. Some teams recover 65 or 70 percent of fumbles in a given season, and others recover 30 or 35 percent. That alone can make a difference of five or 10 turnovers in a given year. Plus, some teams hold onto their interceptions, and others don't.

The simple fact that the ball is pointy adds a significant amount of randomness to a 12-game season. And Nebraska is pretty clear evidence of that. In 2015, the Huskers recovered just 10 of 26 fumbles (38 percent) and managed to pick off 10 passes while breaking up 50. That means that just 17 percent of the Huskers' passes defensed were interceptions; the normal average is between 21 and 23 percent.

Opponents, meanwhile, caught 21 of 68 passes defensed, 31 percent. Add all of this up, and you've got a Nebraska turnover margin of minus-12 when national averages would have suggested something closer to even. Do you think an extra turnover per game might make a difference in a year that saw you lose six games by one possession?

Let's put it this way: According to S&P+, Nebraska ranked 36th in offensive S&P+ and 57th in defensive S&P+; 12–2 Iowa, meanwhile, ranked 32nd on defense and 56th on offense. On a play-by-play basis, the Hawkeyes and Huskers were very similar. And while Iowa got its hands on more passes and prevented opponents from doing the same, its turnover margin should have been around plus-6 or plus-7. Instead, it was plus-11.

Keep this in mind when you're taking stock of the Big Ten West landscape. Both Nebraska and Iowa ranked in the 40s in S&P+ last season — yes, the 40s; Iowa didn't beat a team that ranked higher than 31st, got destroyed by No. 10 Stanford, and eked by No. 60 Indiana and No. 61 Illinois, among others — and now Nebraska returns its leading passer, rusher, receiver and 12 of last year's top 16 tacklers. The Huskers have issues but aren't nearly as far from the top of the West as you might think.

JOSHUA DOBBS

TENNESSEE

How many consecutive years can you be a team on the rise? Because of strong recruiting, it has felt like Butch Jones is going to break through with the Volunteers any minute now, but close losses have consistently held the Volunteers back. They lost to Georgia, Florida and Missouri (combined record: 28–11) by a combined 12 points in 2014 and lost to Oklahoma, Florida, Arkansas and Alabama (43–12) by a combined 17 in 2015. They owned the dubious distinction of leading two separate College Football Playoff participants in the fourth quarter but losing to both.

As you are learning, however, close losses against good teams don't hurt you very much with the computers. In 2015, Tennessee beat three 10-win teams (Bowling Green, Georgia and Northwestern) by a combined 75 points, won nine games for the first time in eight years and ranked a healthy 22nd in S&P+. They sustained 2014's gains, and with ongoing quarterback issues at Florida and a new regime at Georgia, they will seem to many like the safest bet in the SEC East.

Of course, like Washington, the Vols still have to learn how to win. There's no guarantee that experience will alleviate the sort of conservatism and clamminess that beset them late against Oklahoma and Florida in particular. But while Jones is just 6–9 in one-possession games at Tennessee, he's 22–21 for his career. At the least, this serves as a reminder that clamminess isn't always a concern. And if UT gets about half a quarter better, look out, SEC.

LEONARD FOURNETTE

LSU

Les Miles' LSU Tigers looked abysmal during a three-game, season-defining stretch last November. After running into a jackhammer known as Alabama in Tuscaloosa, they followed with a 17-point home loss to Arkansas and a 21-point road loss to Ole Miss. This very nearly got Miles fired and distracted us from the fact that LSU was awfully good the other nine games.

Thanks in part to one of the hardest schedules in the country, LSU finished the season 9–3 but ranked ninth in S&P+, ahead of 12–2 Stanford (No. 10) and 12–2 Michigan State (No. 13). With a kinder schedule, perhaps the young Tigers wouldn't have briefly run out of gas.

LSU wasn't as bad as you thought, and now the Tigers return more of last year's production than anyone in the country. They started only four seniors in the bowl win over Texas Tech and lost only two early entries to the draft. They return their Heisman favorite running back, their two deep-threat receivers, four starters on the line and 10 defensive starters. Plus, they likely made an upgrade in defensive coordinators, from Kevin Steele to Dave Aranda.

LSU has plenty of questions left to answer. The quarterback position has been in flux for a couple of years, and the defense was pretty weak against the run. But if Aranda can shore up the latter, Father Time might help with the former. Brandon Harris actually has some experience this time around. And he still has some murderous skill position weapons around him.

Dobbs: Tom DiPace; Fournette: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

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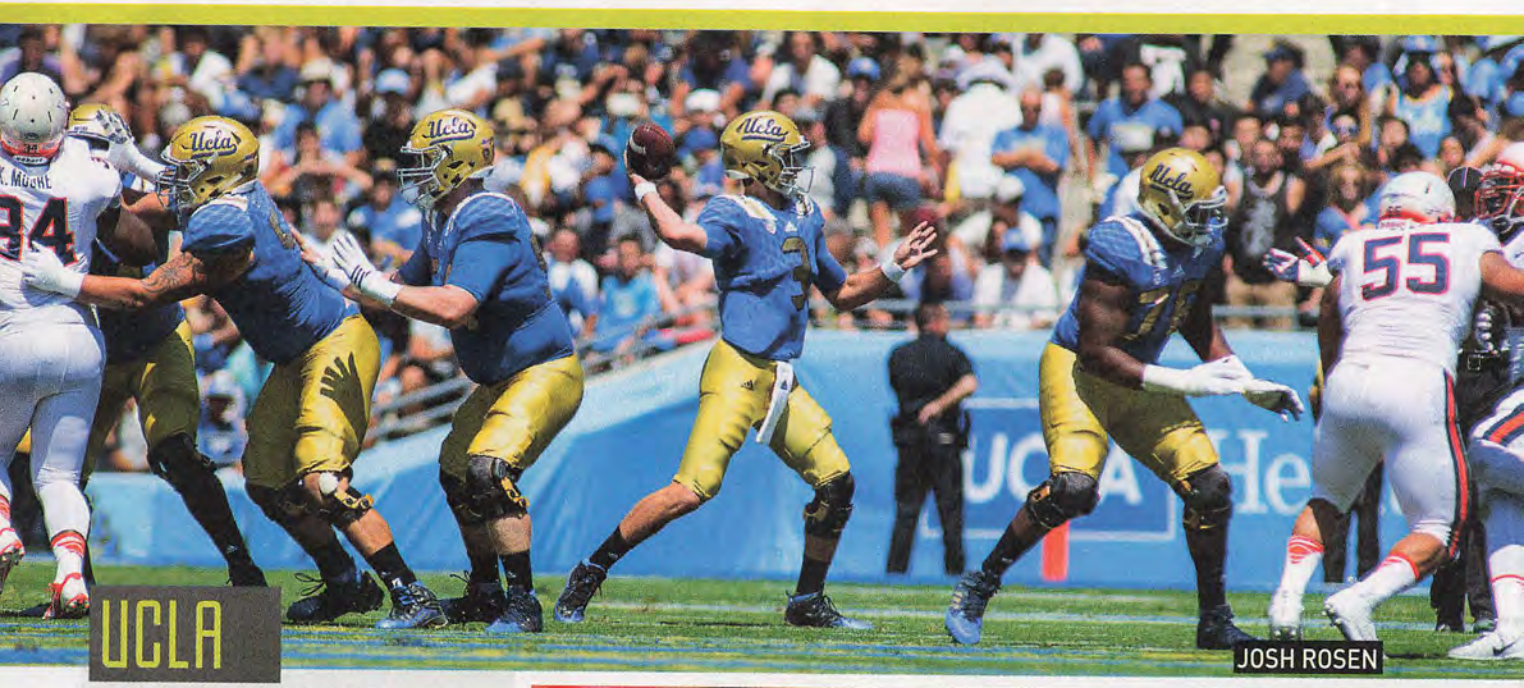

JOSH ROSEN

UCLA

At first glance, UCLA's 2015 season was a disappointment. Ranked as high as seventh in the AP poll early in the year, the Bruins stumbled to an 8–5 record, ending two streaks in the process — a three-game winning streak over USC and a three-year run of nine wins or more.

But the Bruins still finished with a decent No. 23 ranking in S&P+. They beat solid BYU, Cal and Utah teams, lost perhaps their two best defenders to early-season injuries, and suffered some unlikely circumstances in some of their losses. They recovered neither of two fumbles and strangely gave up two safeties against Arizona State, and they recovered zero of two fumbles again against USC while giving up two return scores (one off of a fumble).

The numbers care about these things even if our eyes only see losses by double digits.

Oh yeah, and the Bruins had a true freshman at quarterback. Even a blue-chipper — and to be sure, Josh Rosen was the bluest of blue chippers — is going to suffer through inconsistency as a freshman.

With USC changing coaches (and quarterbacks), Utah replacing most of its offense and four of its top five tacklers, and Arizona and ASU both looking to rebuild after disappointing campaigns, UCLA might return enough to become the Pac-12 South favorite. Rosen loses his leading rusher and receiver, but normal year-to-year development could make him awfully good in 2016, no matter the supporting cast.

MARQUEL LEE

WAKE FOREST

If you can survive an extreme youth movement and keep both your two-deep and your job intact, you usually see the fruits of your labor by your third year on the job. Wake Forest head coach Dave Clawson stripped the building down to its foundation in his first year and saw modest improvement in his second, and now he might have the pieces in place for a run at .500.

Wake Forest went just 3–9 last season and isn't a division contender like the other teams on this list. But the Demon Deacons suffered from pretty poor turnovers luck and lost four games by one possession, all to bowl teams (Indiana, Florida State, Louisville, Duke). And after plummeting to 112th in S&P+ with the worst offense in the country in 2014, the Deacs improved to 92nd last fall. The defense was competitive (61st in defensive S&P+), and at the very least the offense was less awful (107th in offensive S&P+).

It's always easy to say that a team that bottomed out like Wake in 2014 is going to rise because it almost can't fall anymore. But Wake improved by 20 spots despite a lineup that was still terribly young: Of the 48 names on the season-ending two-deep, only seven were seniors, and only four of those were starters. There were eight true freshmen — that's right, there were more true freshmen than seniors — along with 12 redshirt freshmen and 10 sophomores.

In a division that features both Clemson and Florida State, there's a pretty hard ceiling for a program like Wake Forest at the moment. But don't be surprised if the Deacs improve into at least the 70s and pull an upset or two.

Rosen: Peter Brouillet; Lee: Chris Keane

Cracker Barrel
Old Country Store

AFTER THE GAME

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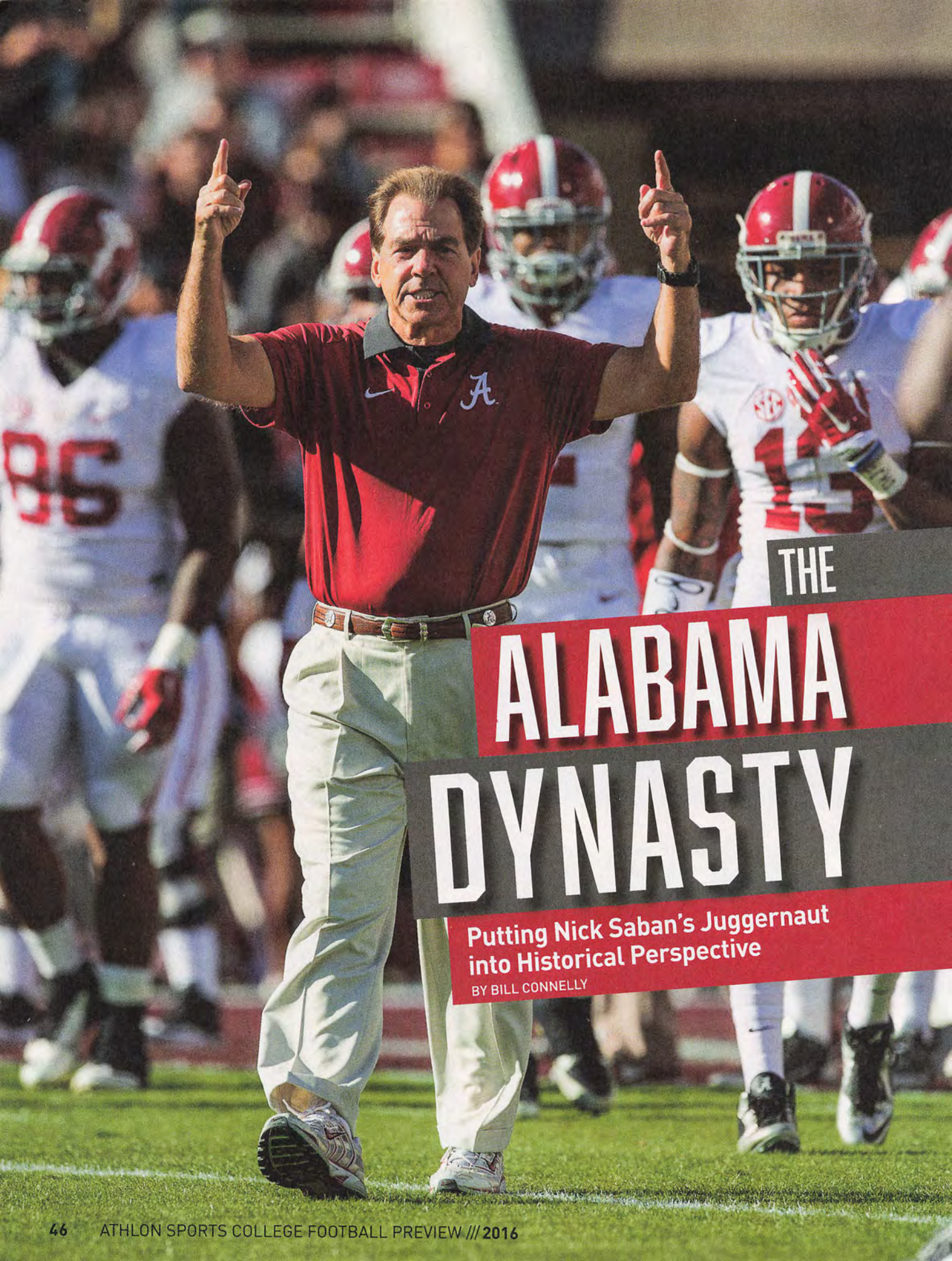

THE ALABAMA DYNASTY

Putting Nick Saban's Juggernaut into Historical Perspective

BY BILL CONNELLY

Eight years is a lifetime for a college football program. In 2008, Mack Brown's Texas program had not yet collapsed. Mark Mangino and Kansas were coming off a 12-win season. Penn State was still cruising along with Joe Paterno. Urban Meyer was at Florida, Pete Carroll was at USC, Mike Leach was at Texas Tech and Jim Tressel was at Ohio State. USF was still viable under Jim Leavitt. Current Arizona State head coach Todd Graham's Tulsa team and former Michigan coach Brady Hoke's Ball State spent time in the top 25. So did Houston Nutt's Ole Miss Rebels. Feels like two decades ago, right?

As 2008 began, Alabama was a bit of a national afterthought. The Tide had gone just 13–13 in 2006-07, and while much was expected of well-paid Nick Saban when he was hired in '07, his team had lost to ULM and made only the Independence Bowl in his debut season. They were given a courtesy No. 24 ranking in the preseason in 2008.

Computers don't care as much about a specific win or loss as humans do. They don't tend to give a conference title bonus. They simply care about whether you're consistently awesome. My S&P+ ratings have been recorded at FootballOutsiders.com since 2008; they were among the first play-by-play ratings created for college football, and they measure team efficiency and explosiveness (plus other pieces of the Five Factors — field position, finishing drives, turnover factors) through play-by-play and drive data.

TOP-5 FINISHES IN THE S&P+ RATINGS SINCE 2008

7	Alabama
4	Oklahoma
3	Auburn, Florida, Ohio State
2	Boise State, Oregon, Texas
1	Arkansas, Baylor, Clemson, Florida State, LSU, Notre Dame, Oklahoma State, Ole Miss, Penn State, Stanford, TCU, Texas A&M, USC, Virginia Tech

A great computer rating doesn't guarantee the utmost level of success. Sometimes what the computers see as the best team suffers some bad breaks and loses. Sometimes a good-but-not-incredible team wins a ton of games because of some combination of scheduling and good luck. (Hello, 2015 Iowa.) But Alabama has consistently won over both the eyeballs and the computers for nearly a decade straight.

DERRICK HENRY

In college football terms, the 1970s don't resemble the 2010s in many ways. From a dynasties perspective, the 1970s were the peak for the bluebloods of the sport. Nine royal programs — Oklahoma (nine), Michigan (nine), Nebraska (nine), Alabama (eight), Ohio State (seven), Penn State (seven), USC (six), Notre Dame (five) and Texas (five) — combined to occupy 65 of the 100 year-end spots in the AP top 10 between 1970 and 1979.

From a football perspective, things were different as well. Just as the spread has of late, the wishbone dominated the college football landscape. Among others, Alabama, Oklahoma, Nebraska and Texas (which invented the formation in the late-1960s) all thrived with their own variations of the crippling, explosive formation.

Sure, there is still very much a ruling class in today's game. And there are plenty of wishbone parallels in the way the spread has both proliferated and forced a lot of defenses to get smaller and faster to adapt. Still, the 2010s are not the 1970s for the most part.

But one crimson machine is just as powerful now as it was then.

You're only as good as your last hire, and for many top-tier programs, a good hire is all it takes to establish at least temporary residence near the top of college football. But Saban wasn't a good hire for Alabama; he was a spectacular one. He has done so well in Tuscaloosa that we are able, with a straight face, to compare him to Bear Bryant.

Bryant was summoned from Texas A&M to Alabama on the heels of Jennings "Ears" Whitworth's horrific three-year tenure in Tuscaloosa. From 1955-57, the Crimson Tide went just 4–24–2. In a decade in which only Oklahoma was able to remain a power from start to finish, Alabama had managed to disappear from football relevance.

Bryant brought the Tide back almost instantly. After a 5–4–1 campaign in 1958, Alabama was back in the top 10 in 1959, finishing 7–2–2 with a Liberty Bowl loss. Between 1960-66, the Crimson Tide would lose more than one game in a season just one time. They went 68–6–3 in those seven years, winning three AP national titles and very nearly winning a fourth (they lost the controversial 1966 title to Notre Dame).

What sets Bryant apart from most coaches, however, is that he had two different peaks. After a down period in the late-1960s, defined by both a lack of offensive identity and a struggle to integrate his roster as the South's most prominent program, Bryant and Bama began another run. From 1971-81, the Tide never finished lower than 11th; they won double-digit games nine times (a tougher thing to accomplish in the days of 11-game seasons); and they secured two more AP titles. It was pretty easy to be a blueblood in the 1970s, but Alabama was perhaps the bluest of the bunch.

The numbers back that up. Using an estimated version of S&P+ derived from points scored and points allowed (the only reliable numbers in college football from any time before the 1990s), from 1971-80 the Tide ranked second six times, third twice and fifth twice. And that came on the heels of the earlier run (1961-66), in which they ranked first once, second three times, fourth once and eighth once.

All told, Bryant won 232 games as Alabama's head coach and engineered 19 top-10 finishes. Saban has 105 and eight, respectively, and at 64 years old, he would have to coach until he was about 80 to match Bryant's numbers. He's probably not going to do that. But if he sticks around another few years, he could match Bryant's elite finishes. Bryant ranked first or second in estimated S&P+ 10 times. Saban's already within four of that in less than a decade.

Here's another number he could match pretty soon: Bryant won five national titles in 25 years at Alabama. In a more parity-friendly era, Saban has four, and the

Saban: Wesley Hitt; Henry: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

Tide appear positioned to make a run at a fifth this coming season (and the year after that, and the year after that). In just over one-third of the time, he's won almost as many rings as the king. (Granted, Bryant could have benefited from having a four-team playoff. That could have offered him more opportunities not granted during a rather restrictive bowl era.)

Great Alabama Coaches (Years)	Zero- or 1-loss seasons	Top-2 finishes (Est. S&P+)
Wallace Wade (8, 1923-30)	4	4
Frank Thomas (15, 1931-46)	7	3
Bear Bryant (25, 1958-82)	13	10
Gene Stallings (7, 1990-96)	3	0
Nick Saban (9, 2007-15)	4	6

Being great at Alabama isn't the hardest thing in the world to pull off. (See above.) Alabama quickly learned that it really enjoyed this sport in the 1920s and has invested in it and attained a high level of success in perhaps more eras than any other program.

But Bryant and Saban truly stand apart. And it felt nearly preordained from the start. Bryant had already engineered an 11–1 season at Kentucky in 1950 and finished in the top five with Texas A&M in 1956; his Aggies reached No. 1 in the country in 1957 before a late fade (which happened to coincide with Bear-to-Bama rumors).

Saban, meanwhile, had already engineered a top-10 finish at a Michigan State program that had had finished in the top 10 only once in 30 years. And he had won a national title in 2003 at LSU.

The dynastic aspect of the 1970s indeed makes this a tough comparison, one in which Saban still fares rather well. Adjusting for era, however, the best comparison for Saban might not be Bryant at all — it might be Bobby Bowden.

Bowden, the former Florida State head coach, pulled off perhaps the most underrated achievement of all-time in the 1980s and 1990s, and it continued after the early-'90s scholarship limits came into effect.

Bowden didn't initially need long to turn Florida State into a program worth noticing. The Seminoles were just 4–29 in the three seasons before he arrived, but after a 5–6 debut campaign in 1976, he and his team served notice that the state of Florida might soon have a national power.

From 1977-80, FSU went 39–8 with two top-10 finishes. The Noles reached 11–0 and fourth in the polls in 1979 before an Orange Bowl loss to Oklahoma; in 1980, they were second at 10–1, having beaten two top-five teams, when they fell again to Oklahoma in the Orange.

The air briefly came out of the balloon, however. FSU took on one of the hardest schedules ever in 1981 — in consecutive weeks, they played on the road against Nebraska, Ohio State, Notre Dame, Pitt (at a time when Pitt was a national power) and LSU — and went just 6–5. And between 1981-86, the Noles averaged a decent, but unspectacular, 7.5 wins per season.

In 1987, however, the pieces came together. Behind All-Americans Deion Sanders, Paul McGowan and Pat Carter, FSU finished 11–1, missing out on a national title because of a failed, last-minute two-point conversion against Miami. In 1988, the Seminoles went 11–1 again. In 1989, 10–2. Et cetera.

From 1987-2000, despite the sustained emergence of in-state rival Miami, Florida State finished in the AP top five every season. They spent portions of seven seasons at No. 1. The Noles never lost more than two games in a season in this span and lost one or fewer eight times. Thanks usually to losses to Miami, FSU claimed just two national titles, but never in college football's poll era has there been a sustained stretch of 14 dominant years like this.

It's the same from a computer perspective. The estimated S&P+ ratings also had FSU in the top four for each year of this stretch — the Noles ranked first five times (1987, '92, '93, '97, '99), second four times, third three times and fourth twice. And the dominance was balanced — they ranked in the top 10 in offensive S&P+ and defensive S&P+ 10 times each.

Oklahoma's Bud Wilkinson engineered 11 straight AP top-10 finishes (only one outside of the top five) between 1948-58; under Chuck Fairbanks and Barry Switzer, the Sooners made a 10-year run from 1971-80. Bryant made it 10 straight years in the top 10 during his first run, and Bo Schembechler made it 10 years with Michigan. Under Jimmy Johnson and Dennis Erickson, Miami made it eight straight years. Under Bob Devaney and Tom Osborne, Nebraska made it seven straight. Under Jim Tressel, Ohio State made it six straight.

BEAR BRYANT

Not even Saban will make it 14 straight years in the top five like Bowden — Alabama finished 10th in 2010 and seventh in 2013. But he's at eight straight years in the top 10, and to say the least, four national titles earn you some bonus points.

Alabama doesn't have a Miami, of course. During FSU's 14-year run, the Hurricanes finished in the estimated S&P+ top 10 eight straight years from 1987-94 and in the top two four times; then, after dealing with sanctions and controversy, Butch Davis' Canes helped end Bowden's streak with a series of recruiting wins and dominant teams.

Still, each new season produces a unique set of elite teams to compete with Alabama: Saban's 2008-09 teams split a pair of huge battles with Urban Meyer and Tim Tebow and Florida, then split a pair of heavyweight battles with LSU in 2011. Gus Malzahn and Auburn kept the Tide from the BCS title game in 2013, and Meyer's Ohio State squad knocked Bama out of the College Football Playoff in 2014. Though there are constant threats, and other great teams besides Bama at any given time, the Tide are always on the list.

When Saban first came to Tuscaloosa, he was given a $4 million per year contract that was at the high end of college football's money spectrum. As coach salaries have gotten more obnoxious, so has Saban's — he is currently making almost $7 million before bonuses. But no coach in the sport has proven himself worth such an obscene sum. Alabama is getting exactly what it has been paying for: the best coach in college football, and one of the best of all-time.

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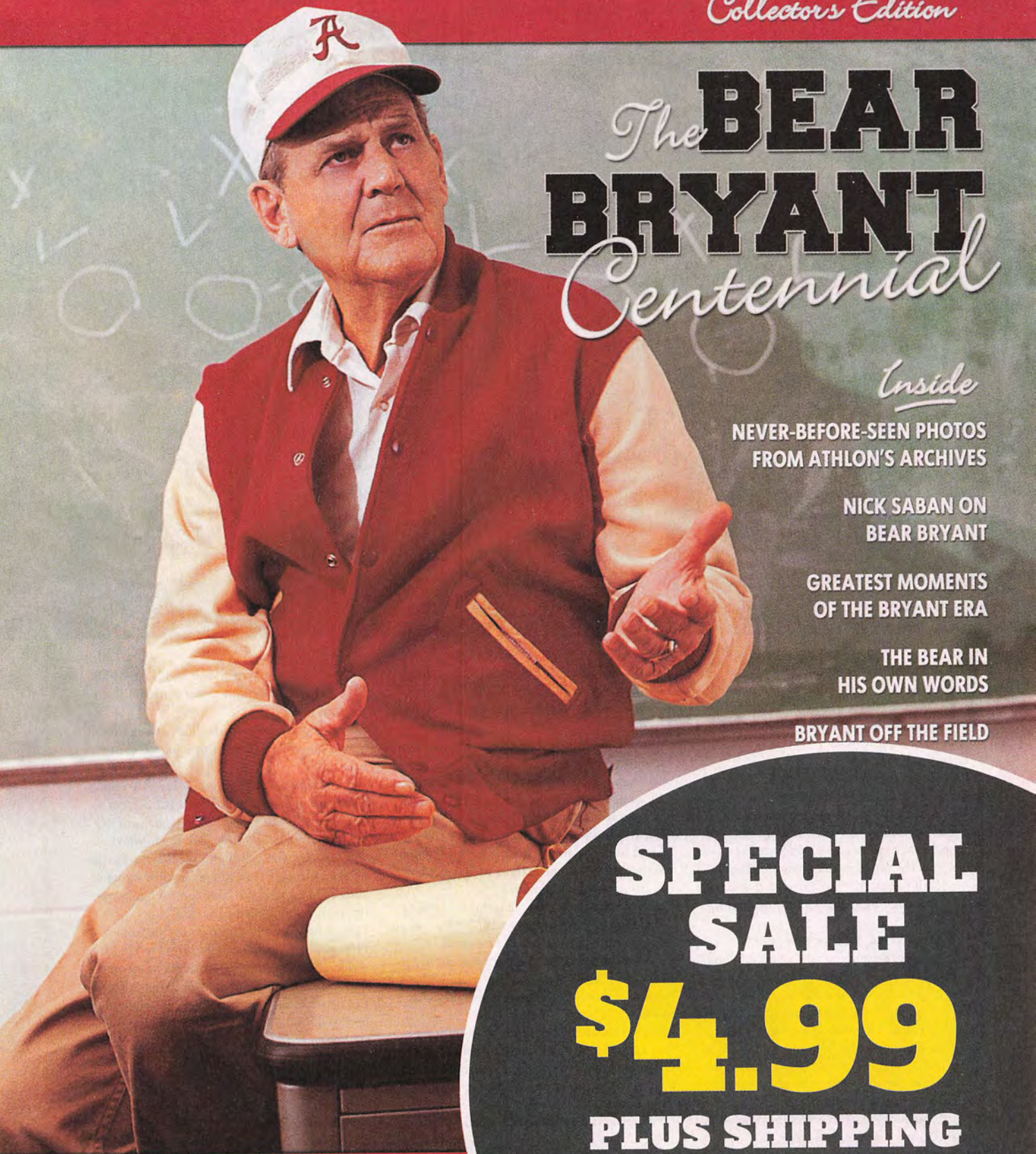

The BEAR BRYANT Centennial

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THE FIRST 100 DAYS

Even Before the Excitement Wears Off for a New Head Coach, the Challenges — and the Panic — Begin

BY DAVID FOX

MATT CAMPBELL

Dozens of coaches every year go to bed one night in the winter having just realized a dream. Maybe they've taken their first head coaching job; maybe they've reached the top of the profession.

Everything is grand.

By the next morning, the rush of excitement turns into an avalanche of anxiety.

This new head coach is responsible for 100 scholarship players and walk-ons. He needs to hire assistant coaches and support staff and lead them, too. He has to recruit an entire class in a matter of weeks. All the demands of being a CEO of a major football operation are staring back at him.

"It's an emotional high for your family getting the opportunity to take a new job," new Bowling Green coach Mike Jinks says. "And then you wake up the next morning and, 'OK, who am I going to get to keep (in the recruiting class)?' It's almost a panic type of deal. Then you start thinking about who you would like to bring in."

As early as September last season, it was clear the 2015-16 coaching carousel would be one of the most compelling in years. The first coach was fired a week before the season. By Nov. 1, nine coaches had resigned, retired or been fired. South Carolina and Virginia Tech replaced legends. Georgia, USC and Miami (Fla.) hired new coaches. Illinois, essentially, hired two head coaches.

The job of a college football coach grows more expansive with every passing year. The most challenging time may be the first few months.

"A lot of times in these coaching changeovers you can make mistakes early on," says Iowa State coach Matt Campbell, who is taking the second head coaching job in his career. "Unfortunately when you make those mistakes, they can haunt you down the road."

Some of the challenges are obvious — filling a recruiting class and hiring a staff.

Some tasks are less clear. For example, Campbell received his first commitment to his new class at Iowa State and had an immediate dilemma — how do we present this on social media?

During a meeting with staff on other topics, they started to spitball ideas for hashtags for the Cyclones. One idea was #TheStormIsBrewing, but in an effort to save characters on Twitter, they picked #AStormIsBrewing.

No detail can be overlooked for a new coach.

"I don't know that I'm really proud of that, but it was a good discussion on what we're going to hashtag," says Campbell, who also changed his Twitter handle within hours of leaving Toledo for Ames.

The job of a new coach is all about meeting people and shaking hands, too, and some of it is by chance.

Here's how new UTSA coach Frank Wilson, the former running backs coach at LSU, got to know some of the folks in student housing at his new campus: "You get a freshman who is a midyear guy who is living in the dorm area who brings a Crock-Pot in where Crock-Pots aren't allowed. And then you have to let them know no harm was intended. He's new."

As 28 new coaches take over at jobs from Honolulu to Piscataway, from USC to ULM, *Athlon Sports* checked in with the new coaching class of 2016 to ask them about their figurative first 100 days on the job — everything that occurred from the day they were hired to the start of spring practice.

WHAT A COACH DOES FIRST DEPENDS ON WHEN HE'S HIRED

The first variable thrown at a new coach is the recruiting calendar.

Most coaches are hired between early December and early January, but the NCAA's recruit-

Campbell: Iowa State Athletics; Fuente: Brooke Leonard/Virginia Tech; Durkin: Maryland Athletics

ing calendar varies during this time, from the least restrictive portion (the contact period) to the most restrictive (the dead period) and back again. In 2015-16, the dead period extended from Dec. 14 through Jan. 13, meaning coaches during that time were not allowed in-person contact with recruits, even on campus. The weeks before and after include the contact period when coaches can visit recruits and families in their homes.

A coach hired on Dec. 5 like Dino Babers at Syracuse had nine days of in-person recruiting. His replacement at Bowling Green, Jinks, didn't have that luxury on Dec. 10.

"They had the press conference and, boom, I'm on the road," Jinks says.

The night of the press conference introducing him at South Carolina, Will Muschamp met with remaining staff to go over the recruiting board. With a week until the dead period, Muschamp's first priority was to visit the six high school prospects who were looking to enroll early at South Carolina, including five offensive skill players the Gamecocks sorely needed.

"Recruiting is the lifeblood of your program, so you cannot waste a day," Muschamp says. "You're so limited in the number of times you can go out, so you've got to maximize that."

Maximizing time doesn't just mean grinding to get that first class. It means recruiting efficiently. Not knowing the recruiting landscape can be devastating. A new coach might breathe new life into recruiting or open doors that otherwise had been closed.

But the new guy also needs to know when to walk away.

"The worst thing you can do — and this was a lesson I learned at Florida in a transition — you can't waste time on guys you're not going to get," Muschamp says. "The worst thing you can do is waste time on a guy if you have no shot at a guy."

D.J. Durkin was hired at Maryland on Dec. 2 at the start of the contact period and then moved quickly to make his first staff hires, two head coaches who had just been fired in Virginia's Mike London and Syracuse's Scott Shafer. The latter abruptly stepped down for personal reasons on April 1.

That was enough to give Durkin a fighting chance for a week or so on the road recruiting before filling out his staff during the dead period.

"I hired one or two guys right off the bat that I knew I wanted here and I knew could help in recruiting," Durkin says. "It was, 'We'll go out and hold this together until we get to end of the contact period.'"

At Ball State, Mike Neu felt the time crunch more than most. Pete Lembo left unexpectedly to take an assistant coaching job at Maryland on Dec. 22. The Cardinals hired Neu, a New Orleans Saints quarterbacks coach and former Ball State quarterback, on Jan. 7.

When the contact period started for Neu, he wanted to reach out to players who had already committed to Ball State, but 15 of 18 of them had already taken their official visits to Muncie — NCAA rules allow only one official visit to each school.

"The only way I was going to be able to see those kids was to travel to them," Neu says.

Over two-and-a-half weeks, Neu traveled to Chicago, St. Louis and Baltimore, among other places, just to hold together a recruiting class.

ULM coach Matt Viator had no scrambling to do. There was nowhere to go when he was hired amid the dead period. Instead, he watched game and practice film from 2015, worked on his recruiting strategy and communicated with recruits the only permissible ways — through emails and social media and limited phone calls.

"We certainly filled the time," says Viator, who was hired after spending 10 years as the head coach at McNeese State. "We were able to identify guys and find guys we could get on campus when we did go out."

D.J. DURKIN

THE LONG GAME IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS THE FIRST RECRUITING CLASS

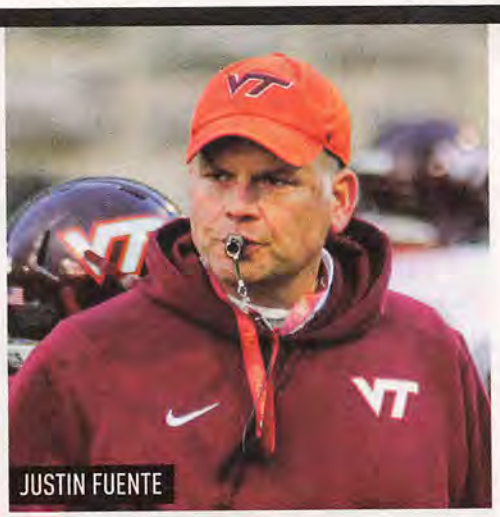
A coach's first recruiting class, predictably, is a minefield of potential recruiting missteps.

Commitments and top targets from the last coaching staff change their minds or get poached by other teams. The new staff may be less enthusiastic about commitments to the previous staff, who might not fit a new style of play. New coaches may not have the full picture of needs.

"Any time you come in late, you can make a mistake because you're trying to fill a recruiting class and ultimately you sign guys just to sign them," Campbell says.

Part of Campbell's strategy was to go after recruits he already knew — because three of them committed to him at Toledo.

While it's understood that a coach's first signing class with a school could be lacking or incomplete, that first class is critical, says Babers. By the time the first recruiting class comes of age, the new coach will be expected to have a finished product on the field.


JUSTIN FUENTE

"The key to who is going to be better or worse in the next few years is that scramble of what happened in your first class because those are going to be the seniors on your team, the juniors or on your team in 3-4 years," says Babers, who has also been a head coach at Eastern Illinois and Bowling Green.

And as new coaches are trying to cobble together their first class, they're trying to lay the groundwork for the next one.

Justin Fuente is an Oklahoma native who was an assistant at TCU and head coach at Memphis. He did enough homework before he arrived at Virginia Tech to understand that the Hokies had fallen behind in recruiting the Virginia Beach/Tidewater area. His staff hit the clinic circuit in the spring in Richmond, Northern Virginia and the "757" Virginia Beach area.

"We really reached out to those people and put our own clinic on out there," Fuente says. "I have a call list every day of guys I'm reaching out to either introduce myself to or talk about their kids."

At Memphis, Mike Norvell has set up "socials" with high school coaches when they visit the campus. Norvell and his staff set up whiteboards around the facility so his assistants can talk ball with high school coaches and have a bite to eat (high school coaches, by NCAA rule, have to pay for their own food). "I'm not a huge clinic guy because I believe when you have a clinic, you go and hear what one guy wants to talk about for an hour," says Norvell, the former Arizona State offensive coordinator. "When you have a social, it's a lot more personal."

COACHES HAVE THEIR STAFF PLANNED BEFORE THEY'RE HIRED

The old cliché about good athletic directors is that they constantly have the names of five coaches in mind just in case they have to replace their football coach unexpectedly.

Aspiring head coaches have a similar mental list for their first coaching staffs.

"When you're on the road, or recruiting, or at clinics or watching practices at other institutions, you're always evaluating people, evaluating how they coach a particular unit," Toledo coach Jason Candle says.

Conversations can be explicit, or a potential assistant might not even know he's on the mind of a future head coach.

DINO BABERS

When Scottie Montgomery left his role as Duke's offensive coordinator to coach at East Carolina, he needed someone he could trust to run an offense while he took over as a program CEO. His top candidate was someone he remembered watching on film of Marshall with another coaching staff years ago. When Montgomery became a head coach, he called Tony Peterson, who had since moved from Marshall to Louisiana Tech, to run his offense at East Carolina.

"You have a lot of football relationships that people will never know, whether you've prepared against them somewhere along the line or you've watched a tape six years ago that they were great on and then you reach out to them," Montgomery says. "You just start to build a list of people you want to talk to."

Even the best intentions and plans don't guarantee a staff will work out.

Muschamp's first staff at Florida in 2011 included two eventual head coaches (Durkin at Maryland and Dan Quinn with the Atlanta Falcons), but his offensive coordinator hire of Charlie Weis was a blunder from which Muschamp's offenses never recovered. Two other offensive assistants from his first staff didn't make it to their second season with the Gators.

When Muschamp got a second chance to hire his first coaching staff at South Carolina, he started with Kurt Roper, his final offensive coordinator at Florida. Muschamp went so far to say that he felt if he hired Roper in 2011, he'd still be at Florida.

"I felt like I tried to fit a square peg into a round hole." Muschamp says. "We tried to go too far away, which set us back further, in my opinion, offensively."

At Minnesota, Tracy Claeys also had to make a key organizational decision. Under predecessor Jerry Kill, quarterback coach Jim Zebrowski and offensive line coach Matt Limegrover split coordinator duties with Kill having the final say.

Claeys, who had been Minnesota's defensive coordinator, didn't feel comfortable in that structure, so he parted with Zebrowski and Limegrover and hired a traditional offensive coordinator, Jay Johnson from UL Lafayette.

"I think that one guy needs to be in charge on one side of the ball," Claeys says. "(The previous arrangement) worked well because coach was the in-between. He spent most of his time in the meetings and was on the headset and knew what was going on."

THE MOST IMPORTANT HIRE ISN'T WHO YOU'D THINK

Coaches can torpedo their own tenures with the wrong coordinator hire or an assistant who doesn't mesh with the rest of the staff or a lack of assistants who can recruit to the school. But a coordinator or ace recruiter isn't necessarily the most important hire to some new coaches.

When Ohio State co-defensive coordinator Chris Ash started to talk to Rutgers about the Scarlet Knights' head coaching job, his next conversation was with Ohio State's assistant strength & conditioning coach Kenny Parker. Without Parker as his head strength and conditioning coach, Ash wasn't going anywhere.

"It was the biggest (hire), to be honest with you," Ash says. "If he said no way, I probably wouldn't have done it. It was that important."

Rutgers agreed and paid Parker more than anyone on Ash's staff other than the coordinators and more than twice as much as his predecessors. Strength coaches often have more hands-on time with players, particularly during the summer. Even veteran coaches grant them a status as important as coordinators. For a first-year coach, being able to implement a conditioning program without a lot of discussion or meetings can be critical.

"I asked him how are you going to train them; he said like we do here [at Ohio State]," Ash says. "It was a done deal"

THE FIRST TEAM GETS LEFT BEHIND

If a new coaching hire is all about getting excited for the future and breaking with the past, the present gets left behind.

First-time head coaches — at least in the 2016 class — overwhelmingly said they haven't been able to make enough time to work with their own players in their first few months on the job.

"I wish I had more time to spend with our players right now," Ash says. "Those coach-player relationships that you used to have, when you become a head coach, those become hard to build."

Different coaches had different ways of finally carving out the time to connect with players beyond just learning names, position and jersey numbers.

At Syracuse, Babers says he usually waits until after spring practice to set up one-on-one interviews with his team. Neu at Ball State waited until after spring ball, too, only having one-on-one conversations if it involved pressing academic matters. Campbell used a more immediate strategy. Before recruiting, he arranged one-on-one interviews with each of his players for three days.

"Sometimes you can go too fast in this thing instead of really getting a great plan and trying to execute," Campbell says. "The first time I actually left to go on the road was the second week because it was important for me to get to know our kids and get to know what's going on in this program before even going out to talk about what our vision for this program would be."

ATTRITION IS NOT A BAD WORD

New coaches may have to wait to get to know their players, but if some aren't adjusting to the change quickly, sometimes it's best just to let them go.

Now at Texas State, Everett Withers is a head coach for the third time in his career, arriving in San Marcos after two seasons at James Madison. He was also an interim coach at North Carolina after Butch Davis was fired in 2011. But he's also been around the block at Ohio State, Louisville, Texas and Minnesota.

The first few months of a new job, though,

Babers: Syracuse University Athletics; Fritz: Tulane Athletics; Norvell: Joe Murphy; Muschamp: South Carolina Athletics

are generally the same. "We've named it 'The Purge.' It's been called 'The Cleanse,'" Withers says.

Whatever particular name he uses, the message is the same: Not everyone is going to be on board with the coaching transition, and that's OK.

"You're better off that he goes," Withers says. "You're going to lose one guy and probably gain five guys in your program who realize that guy wasn't that valuable anyway."

At Tulane, Willie Fritz has his own cleverly named system to figure out who is welcoming change and who is resisting. He's installed a competition called "Making Waves" that's similar to programs he's used at Central Missouri, Sam Houston State and Georgia Southern.

He set up six teams led by two seniors each who draft their own teammates for a competition based on "accountability, dependability in the classroom, off the field, in the weight room." Winning teams get better meals. Losing teams do extra running. Individual results are public for all to see.

"You find out guys who I like to refer to as 'list' guys," Fritz says. "They're always on a list, whether it's skipping reps in the weight room or being late to class or missing a tutoring appointment. Whatever it is, they're on that list."

NEW COACHES NEED TO BECOME AN EXPERT ON THE SCHOOL ... OR FIND ONE FAST

Recruiting may be all about relationships, but it's also about knowledge. When a recruit's parents ask about a major or a prospect wants to know what he's going to do on Friday and Saturday nights, a coach needs to be ready with an answer.

"When you're trying to sell a place, you need to know about the place," says ULM's Viator. "We were trying to learn that on the fly, too."

Viator tried to learn as much as he could but leaned heavily on director of football operations Phil Shaw, who had been in that role since 2011. During Q&A periods with recruits and families, he deferred to Shaw on any questions on degree programs or campus life.

"I didn't go many places or do much without him there," Viator says.

At Bowling Green, Jinks said he brought in a man he calls "Mr. BG" to talk to his staff. Jinks had spent his coaching career in Texas high schools and at Texas Tech, and much of his staff has a similar background. Van Wright, the assistant to the Vice Provost, was born in Bowling Green, Ohio, graduated from Bowling Green High and — you guessed it — graduated from Bowling Green in 1977.

"He laid it all out there," Jinks says. "You try to take as many notes as you can."

Norvell estimates that he's met with more than 50 people who are involved with working in some capacity with Memphis football players — people who work in the student services, housing or counseling offices.

Campbell talks about "unifying" the vision for the football program and building relationships that were distant from the previous coaching staff.

"When there's a breakdown in those areas, that's when issues can occur," Campbell says. "There are a lot of areas that touch Division I football programs on a day-in, day-out basis."

And those are meetings just from within the university.

Claeys has served as interim head coach at various points of his career as Kill left Minnesota to deal with health issues. Even that experience didn't fully prepare him from demands of his time from various alumni and community groups. It's speaking engagements, promoting an issue, raising money, sending items to raffles and so on.

"You could do four events every day and still not cover everybody," Claeys says.

NEW COACHES ARE LIVING THE VAGABOND LIFE

As families finish up school years, the first few months on the job resemble the bachelor life for a coach.

Muschamp had an apartment in downtown Columbia, S.C., in his first few weeks on the job. Viator spent a few weeks in a ULM dormitory. Even Montgomery, who took a job 100 miles away, spent many of his early days commuting from Duke in Durham to East Carolina in Greenville.

Not that these new coaches would enjoy the home life at this point anyway.

"One of the toughest things about taking a new job is that you're not around your family because they're back selling a house and all that," Fritz says. "One of the good things is that you're not around your family. You're able to devote a bunch of time to the new job."

THE BUCK STOPS HERE

For the former assistants and coordinators, one of the toughest adjustments to the big chair is being the guy with all the answers. For the first time in their careers, some of them are delegating work on a grand scale.

"You've got to prioritize the tasks you have every day," Durkin says. "There's no way you can tackle them all. If you spread yourself too thin or you're doing things out of order, you're going to screwed up."

Candle knew his way around Toledo when he was promoted to replace Campbell. He knew better than most new coaches what made the Rockets a successful program. Suddenly, though, he wasn't the one making suggestions to better the program. He was the one expected to make the decisions on recruiting, staffing, branding and everything else.

"It's one of those things where you prepare, prepare, prepare," Candle says. "Until you get into the chair you don't know what you're really getting into."

WILLIE FRITZ

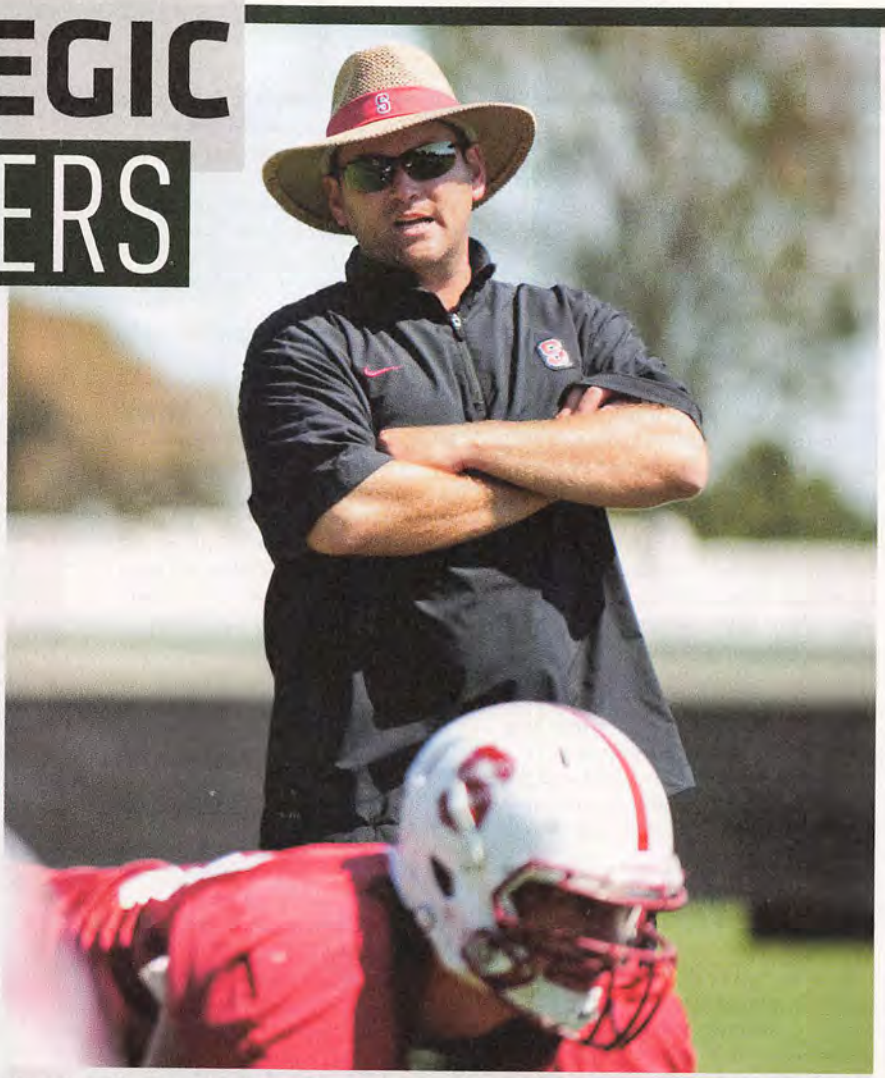
MIKE NORVELL

WILL MUSCHAMP

STRATEGIC MANEUVERS

As soon as one game ends, the critical work of installing a game plan for the next one begins

BY MICHAEL BRADLEY



Stanford offensive coordinator Mike Bloomgren relies on his team's established identity in constructing a game plan.

Even if the Pitt Panthers had to line up against the Steelers on a September Saturday afternoon, Matt Canada would have a plan in place to attack the NFL foe. It sounds preposterous that any college team — even mighty Alabama — would have even the most remote hope against professional opposition, and it's certain the folks in Vegas would be more than happy to take the money of anyone who felt that way.

Canada isn't a dreamer. Better still, the Panthers' offensive coordinator isn't delusional. Pitt isn't beating the Steelers, not if the teams played 100 times. Canada knows that. He also knows that there is always a plan of attack, even if the chances of a positive outcome are practically zero.

"No matter how much better they are than us, there is still a worst guy on their defense," Canada says. "We might be playing the All-Pro team, but there is still a guy that's the worst on the team.

"You find that guy, put together a plan and go after him."

Every week, coaches like Canada perch in stadium press boxes or stand along the sidelines all over the country, hoping their game plans are good enough to offset their opponents' strategies and personnel. Days of meetings, film breakdown, discussion, revisions and practice produce specific blueprints for three hours — four if it's a Big 12 game — of successful (they hope) offensive football.

The process begins in earnest the moment the previous week's game ends. The broad strokes are applied several weeks and even months earlier, as graduate assistants and quality control coaches review tape to determine tendencies and situational responses. From there, it's up to the offensive staff to create a scheme specific to the next team on the schedule.

That plan doesn't radically change each week. It can't, or teams would be trying to learn new offensive principles before each game. Coaches don't do the same things against each opponent, but it is vital that a team's identity is preserved as the strategy is assembled.

"We have a good offensive philosophy that we believe in," says Stanford offensive coordinator Mike Bloomgren. "It's so nice that we know who we are. It's so comforting."

Once the planning is complete, the coaches take it to the practice field for installation. Come Saturday, it's about how well the design addresses the problem — provided the problem stays the same.

Iowa offensive coordinator Greg Davis has been coaching for over four decades and calling plays for more than 30 seasons. He doesn't boast about his experience or ability, but there isn't too much that's going to surprise him come Saturday. That doesn't mean there aren't some days when all of the planning and practicing are replaced by adjusting and ad-libbing.

"Some weeks, you get to the ball game, and the defense does exactly what you expect," Davis says. "Some weeks, you get to the ball game, and the game plan is out the window to some degree. The defense is doing something different or playing a different coverage in a situation you didn't anticipate.

"But it's always important you go in with an overall plan, regardless of who you're playing."

• • •

The Houston offensive staff isn't very nostalgic.

No matter how well or poorly things went on Saturday, the game is all but forgotten by about 2 p.m. Sunday. As soon as the grades are in, and the coaches have watched the tape together, the whole thing heads into the archives. There's another opponent to consider.

StanfordPhoto.com

"It's time to move on," Cougars OC Major Applewhite says.

Each team has its own schedule for creating, revising and implementing a game plan. Davis says most teams assemble and install it "like a crossword puzzle"; it goes in piece by piece, not all at once. At UH, the process begins Sunday when the GAs and quality control folks stand up and brief the full-time staff about the next opponent. Until that point, nobody had been thinking about future rivals. The focus remains on the current challenge. You wonder why programs are devoting more resources to support personnel? It's so that they can handle some of the preparation each week, taking the burden off people like Applewhite.

The briefing won't be too complex. It's more of a starting point, designed to acquaint everybody with the opponent's personality. What are their tendencies? How do they react to the staples of the UH offensive canon? Which personnel group is the best? The most vulnerable? If there is anything unique the Cougars haven't seen to that point during the season, it will be emphasized during that presentation.

"Say we're playing Memphis," Applewhite says. "[GAs and quality control coaches] let us know the base fronts, the base blitzes and base coverages. They tell us who Memphis is in a nutshell."

From there, it's out to the practice field for a brisk, 30-minute session with the players designed to correct mistakes from Saturday and look ahead to the next week. After practice, the Houston coaches reconvene to watch tape of the opponent's last two games against offenses similar to the Cougars'. By mid-October, that isn't a problem, but earlier in the season, it can be difficult to locate tape like that, particularly if the foe has faced, say, Navy's option attack, a pro-style team or an "air raid" outfit that throws the ball 65 times per game. The Cougars employ a "power spread" scheme that is heavy on the run. (UH ran it 237 more times than it passed in '15.)

Teams with new defensive coordinators are particularly troublesome in September matchups: It's unwise to consult tape from the previous season due to the change in scheme. In those cases, coaches have to be creative, seeking out film from the rivals' previous employers or speaking to former colleagues about tendencies and preferences.

"The early part of the season can be a nightmare," Applewhite says. "Sometimes, you end up talking to friends. Three years ago [while he was at Texas], I was up against a former NFL coordinator. I had to call a guy on his [former] staff and ask what principles the coach believed in."

> "No matter how much better they are than us, there is still a worst guy on their defense. ... You find that guy, put together a plan and go after him."
>
> **–Pitt OC Matt Canada**

Oklahoma OC Lincoln Riley says there are some benefits to facing a new defensive coordinator. His scheme may be unfamiliar to opponents, but it's also alien to his players. Sure, it's hard to know what to study, but it's unlikely defenders will be comfortable with the system right away. "It's a guessing game," says Riley, whose Sooner attack was seventh nationally in total yards last season.

On Monday, many staffs complete as much of Davis' "crossword puzzle" as possible. The Sooners work from 5-8 a.m. on assembling the entire plan. At Houston, Applewhite's position coaches work on various responsibilities within the scheme. For instance, running backs coach Kenith Pope is responsible for designing answers to opponents' blitz packages. Tight ends boss Corby Meekins maps out how to attack rival defensive ends. Derek Warehime, the offensive line coach, breaks down the defensive fronts, while Applewhite and new receivers coach Darrell Wyatt will address ways to confront coverages.

The rest of the day is spent applying the staff's recommendations to specific situations, so that a plan can emerge that addresses all of a game's possibilities. They draw up regular down-and-distance plays — first-and-10, second-and-8 — red-zone strategies, third-and-long schemes, screens, gadget plays and short-yardage possibilities. Staffs don't come up with new plays for each game because they don't want to confuse players who have spent weeks learning and executing one system. But that doesn't mean there aren't some variations.

Davis points to the Iowa inside zone running play, which he estimates the Hawkeyes ran "260 times" in 2015. It's going to be in the game plan; that's no secret. But the Hawks will most likely run it differently against Wisconsin than they do versus Illinois.

"We're going to run the inside zone, and opponents know we're going to run the inside zone," Davis says. "But maybe we'll make it look a little different. One week, the emphasis will be on using '21' personnel [two backs, one tight end], and the next week the emphasis is on '11' personnel [one of each], with the tight end moving.

"Very few plays that show up on Saturday, especially running plays, are designed just for that week."

By the time the players hit the field Tuesday — and more and more programs are practicing in the morning — the plan is in place, and it's time to get the players familiar with the parts of the offense that will be featured. Pitt's Canada uses Tuesday for "meat and potatoes" — first- and second-down situations — along with any trick plays that might be used and some seven-on-seven passing drills. Houston follows a similar plan, as does Oklahoma. Riley says that if there is a new play for that game, it goes in Tuesday, the better for players to get maximum time to work on it.

The coaches need as many days as possible to evaluate it, too. That goes for every play in the game plan. As the week goes on, staffs spend hours watching practice tape and trying to decide which plays absolutely must remain. The goal is to make sure the players are as proficient as possible in what they will be asked to run, and the more time they can give to a leaner menu, the better prepared they will be. It's rare to find a staff that is inserting plays as the week goes on.

Applewhite likens his staff to accountants — they measure the cost of every play and ask if it's worth having it in, or if it's "too expensive" — and he isn't alone. Every week, Pitt's graduate assistants will chart how often plays were run during a game and how much practice time was spent on each. The object is to avoid having spent too much time preparing for things that never are used in games.

"We almost always have too much," Canada says. "You see things on film and scratch them. There are enough good plays. Maybe you'll run some of them twice, instead of once. In the average game plan, there are always too many plays."

• • •

As soon as an offensive team crosses the opposing 20-yard line, TV commentators begin to talk about red zone scoring percentages. Applewhite considers those statistics meaningless, because the 20 isn't a sacrosanct border. For his game-plan-

Houston offensive coordinator Major Applewhite relies on a Sunday briefing from support staff to lay the groundwork for each week's game plan.

ning purposes, the red zone begins when the defense decides it does, and not when the boys in the booth say so.

"The red zone starts when the defense changes its alignment," Applewhite says. "It could be the 25 or the 20. A lot of times, it's the 12- or the 8-yard line. Where do they change their coverage, and where do the blitzes start to change? Some teams don't change a lick."

That's why Wednesday practices are so important for the Cougars. They work on third-down packages, but they also install the red zone strategy. As Applewhite says, it's quite different every week, due not only to how opponents defend the area, but also to how they define it. Some teams have "split personalities," according to Applewhite. They may not blitz at all on most of the field, but send everybody but the drumline as the goal line nears.

By the end of practice Wednesday, the players should have ingested the entire strategy. From there, it's a matter of repetition and figuring out which plays work best together. Many coaches will use Thursday or Friday walk-throughs (there is no universal approach to practicing, although some programs are going with full-speed work on Fridays) to have their offenses replicate drives by running seven or eight plays, with varying tempos. This familiarizes everybody with potential combinations and allows coaches to see what works together and what doesn't.

"We practice it the way we call it," Riley says. "We try to fit it together Friday so that it's close to how we'll do it in a game."

Meetings, practices and walk-throughs are important, but at Stanford and a growing number of schools throughout the country, technology plays a big role, too. The Cardinal make use of a virtual reality system that allows players to get extra reps in a classroom by putting on VR goggles and going through practice film to make sure they understand how to attack defenses. If a starter wants more work, he can get it. And if a backup QB wants to see what it's like to take reps with the first team against the enemy defense, that's available, too.

"If a coach is there, he can see on the TV in the room where [the quarterback's] eyes went, and say, 'Whoa! Whoa! Why are you doing that?'" Bloomgren says. "It gives them extra chances to prepare."

As the process of installing and fine-tuning a game plan continues, it's important for the quarterback to feel comfortable with what's going to be called. To that end, coaches try to get an idea of what they like in certain situations. Canada may give his quarterback six plays that could be called on third-and-5 and ask him to rank his top three.

"So, on the first third-and-5 of the game, if nothing has happened that's different than what we expected, I'll call the play that the quarterback likes," Canada says.

Bloomgren asks his passers what plays they would prefer to be called early on. The answers he has received, whether from Andrew Luck or Kevin Hogan, are the same. Each wants an early, easy completion, and each wants to get hit.

"They want to feel like they are in a game," Bloomgren says. "I tell them that it's my job to make sure they don't get hit, but they say they want to get their pads loose."

The coaches put together the plan and teach it, but it's the players who execute it. All of that talk about "Jimmies and Joes" is pretty accurate. No matter how great the scheme might be, it comes down to how well it plays out on the field. It's easy to look at football as a carefully orchestrated game of parries and ripostes, but rarely does everything proceed according to design. In fact, many games are won by exactly how well teams perform when the whole idea goes to hell.

Davis talks about a running play last year in which the back hit the hole, only to find the cornerback unexpectedly waiting for him. Everything else was proceeding properly, but this rogue agent had emerged to trash the run.

"The running back made the guy miss and went 45 yards for a TD," Davis says. "Was that a great play? We blocked well, but the cornerback read it, and our back made him miss.

"You've got to have a plan, but you have to have the players who can make it work."

To make sure his players will be ready to do that, Applewhite and his staff administer a video test Friday before practice, during which they ask all their players what their assignments are on a collection of plays. It's a "very military" approach. A play is announced, and the coaches grill everyone on their roles. This is no time for hesitation or casual behavior. "They are to sit up straight and call out the answer," Applewhite says. "We fire through it, asking all 11 of them. Then we go to the next play."

Although the Cougars are encouraged for the rest of Friday to relax, and coaches aren't grabbing the players for hours of review, Applewhite does remind them that "their preparation doesn't end until the foot hits the ball on Saturday." After kickoff, coaches find out just how good their plans are. Davis emphasizes that while offenses are trying to make what they do look different from week to week, the defenses are doing the same thing. If a certain play looks good against what the opponent has done in the past, it might not be successful when called during a game, thanks to an adjustment to a front or a coverage. In those cases, the key is to address the issue without creating a sense of alarm.

"Maybe we thought a certain running play would work against an 'over' front, and they are now running a 'diamond' front," Davis says. "We'll tell the players, 'Don't panic. This is still a good play. This is how we have to go about it now.'"

It might just work. And if it doesn't, the process starts again as soon as the game ends.

In fact, it's probably already in progress.

Houston Athletics

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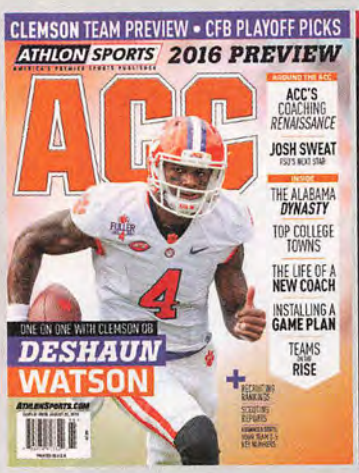

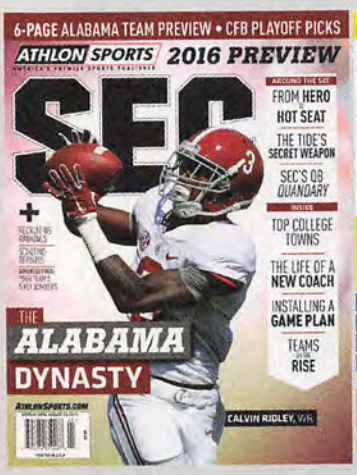

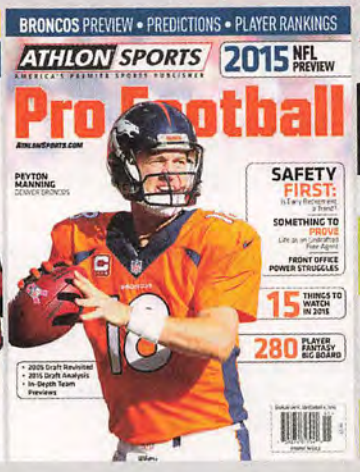

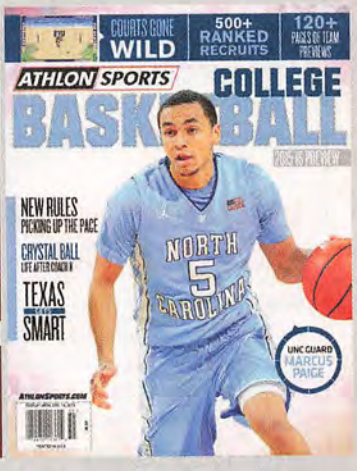

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ATHLON SPORTS' COLLEGE FOOTBALL ROUNDTABLE

ATHLON SPORTS' EDITORS LAY THEIR REPUTATIONS ON THE LINE WITH SOME PREDICTIONS AND ANALYSIS FOR THE 2016 COLLEGE FOOTBALL SEASON

Patterson: Tim Umphrey; Strong: Chris Covatta; Kaaya: Tom DiPace

WHAT TEAM IS THE MOST DIFFICULT TO GET A HANDLE ON?

Steven Lassan: OHIO STATE. Obviously Ohio State has a lot of talent, but this year the Buckeyes return only six starters from a team that didn't play to its potential last year. They also have to play games at Oklahoma and at Michigan State and host Michigan. The Big Ten is improving, and Ohio State lost a lot of talent from last year.

Braden Gall: THE GEORGIA BULLDOGS. You have a relative unknown as head coach. You could have a true freshman playing quarterback. You've got a lot of bodies to replace in the front seven and on the offensive line. In a conference where depth and talent and established commodities are extremely important, Georgia has a lot of unknowns. If Nick Chubb is healthy, if the offensive line comes together and quarterback play is good, they could win the division. Or they could finish fourth.

David Fox: TCU. Not many teams with one returning starter on offense end up in the preseason top 25, but that's what we have for TCU. I trust Gary Patterson as a coach, but I can't figure out if this is a reload or a rebuild. Kenny Hill was a star QB for about three weeks at Texas A&M before being replaced. Now he's got to replace Trevone Boykin. And last year's defense was so decimated by injuries, I'd grade it as an incomplete.

WHAT IS THE MOST FASCINATING TEAM IN THE COUNTRY IN 2016?

Braden Gall: It has to be **LSU.** I don't see how this isn't the most fascinating program, head coach, roster to watch in all of college football. You have an athletic director and boosters who were essentially trying to oust the head coach who has won a national championship. They have the talent to be a champion this year. Brandon Harris has to develop at quarterback. You've got a superstar in Leonard Fournette, who is must-see television at all times. You've got a coach where you don't know what's he's going to do on the sideline, in a press conference or at a booster meeting. Whatever happens in Baton Rouge this year will be fascinating.

Steven Lassan: CLEMSON. History isn't on Clemson's side. It's not easy to get back to the national championship after falling short the previous year. The Tigers do have a lot of pieces in place on offense — Deshaun Watson, a loaded group of receivers, good offensive line. But the defense loses a lot of talent for the second year in a row. Clemson trying to go against history and get back to the National Championship Game makes them the most fascinating team.

David Fox: How about **AUBURN**? It's pretty crazy that Gus Malzahn was untouchable just two years ago, and now he's a hot-seat coach. It's hard to pinpoint what went wrong last season other than the fact that they just weren't very good. And it caught everyone by surprise. No program rides the roller coaster quite like Auburn, and when there's pressure at Auburn, things can get a little crazy.

WHICH COACH HAS THE MOST PRESSURE ON HIM IN 2016?

Braden Gall: **CHARLIE STRONG.** He's a pretty good coach. He has a lot of good young players, especially on the defensive side of the ball. The ongoing quarterback situation should continue to make Texas fans extremely nervous. Anything below six wins, and he's probably out of a job even though he is a heckuva coach and would land on his feet.

Mitch Light: Penn State's **JAMES FRANKLIN.** He's not on the hot seat, but he needs to show progress offensively with the coaching overhaul and the new quarterback. It's a new era there with Christian Hackenberg moving on. If there are the same frustrations with the offense, I think the pressure really starts to mount with what's going on at Michigan, Ohio State and Michigan State.

Steven Lassan: **CLAY HELTON.** Expectations are always high at USC, and Helton wasn't the most overwhelming hire. The Trojans always have talent on both sides of the ball, but the schedule is among the nation's toughest. There's a lot of pressure on Helton to prove that he's the right coach for the long haul right away.

David Fox: **LES MILES.** The way last season unfolded basically turned 2016 into an SEC championship or bust. I can't imagine a bigger pressure situation in the country than being mandated to play for the national championship or else.

WHO WAS THE BEST HIRE OF THE OFFSEASON?

Steven Lassan: **JUSTIN FUENTE** at Virginia Tech. It's not easy replacing Frank Beamer, a legend, at Virginia Tech, but they got the right guy to do it. He seems to be the right guy personality-wise. Fuente transformed Memphis, one of the worst programs in college football, into a team that won 19 games in two years. His background on offense will help after the Hokies have struggled so much on that side of the ball in recent years.

Mitch Light: **WILLIE FRITZ** was great for Tulane. What a coup. I don't know if people were scared off by the option at Georgia Southern, but if you look at his track record, he's won everywhere he's been. A great hire by Tulane.

David Fox: **DINO BABERS** at Syracuse. I loved this hire for Syracuse in particular. There's not a lot of reason to get excited about Syracuse football, and there hasn't been since Donovan McNabb played there. Babers has a big personality and a better offense. He's a change-the-culture kind of guy, and no one needs it more than Syracuse.

WHICH TEAM OUTSIDE OF OUR TOP 25 COULD SURPRISE?

Mitch Light: We underestimate them every year — **MISSISSIPPI STATE.** They lost the best player in school history, but they'll find a way to get good quarterback play. Dan Mullen always gets solid play out of his quarterback. We've picked them last in the SEC West almost by default. Will they finish last? They never do, so that's why they may surprise some people.

Steven Lassan: **MIAMI.** Miami's had a lot of talent for years, but that talent hasn't translated to wins. They have 16 starters back this year. Brad Kaaya is back at quarterback. The schedule sets up favorably. They get Florida State, North Carolina and Pittsburgh at home. It wouldn't surprise me if Miami finishes as a top-25 team.

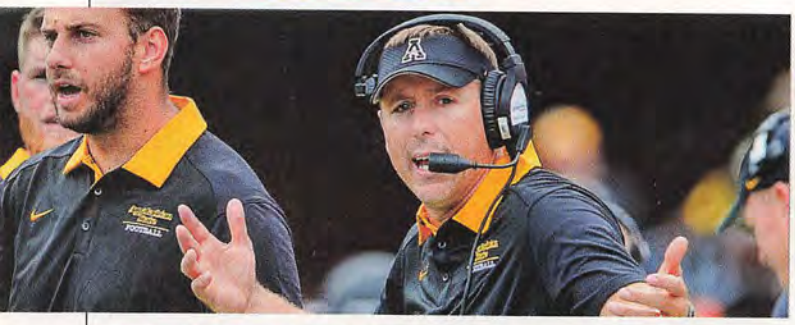
David Fox: **USF.** It took a few years, but Willie Taggart finally delivered a winner at USF. The Bulls were just as good as Houston, Navy, Temple or Memphis in the AAC late last season, and I expect that to continue. They run the ball, they play good defense, and they have a solid quarterback in Quinton Flowers. I think USF is a sleeper pick to upset Houston in the American.

NAME A DARK HORSE HEISMAN CANDIDATE.

Mitch Light: **MYLES GASKIN** from Washington. He had 100 yards rushing in six of nine Pac-12 games as a true freshman. I don't think fans across the nation realize how good he was. He's a big reason why we're so high on Washington.

Braden Gall: **ELIJAH HOOD** at North Carolina. The offense is what makes Larry Fedora's team go, and Elijah Hood put up really good numbers last year in his first full season as a starter, and he has a chance to build on that for a team that can win its division.

David Fox: **CHRISTIAN KIRK** at Texas A&M. Kirk was electrifying in small doses last season, but he tailed off at the end of the season. More stable quarterback play and a new offensive coordinator at A&M should give Kirk more chances to show off.



IF YOU WERE AN ATHLETIC DIRECTOR AT A TOP-20 PROGRAM, WHICH COORDINATOR OR GROUP OF 5 COACH WOULD YOU HIRE, OTHER THAN HOUSTON'S TOM HERMAN?

David Fox: Willie Fritz is quickly joining Herman as that go-to name. If I can't take either, I'm looking at **SCOTT SATTERFIELD** at Appalachian State. I don't think App State ever got enough credit for being successful right off the bat as an FBS member. They've gone 7–5 and 11–2 in their first two years. This year should be more of the same.

Steven Lassan: **WILLIE FRITZ.** Proven winner at a couple of different stops. I was surprised by his jump from Georgia Southern to Tulane. He's adapted to different personnel styles. I think he'd be a good fit at a Power 5 job.

Mitch Light: **WILLIE FRITZ** from Tulane. A great hire by Tulane. The guy has won everywhere he has been. I think he should have gotten a look from some other Power 5 teams. Kansas should have hired him two years ago.

Braden Gall: **LINCOLN RILEY.** He will likely need a little more seasoning in Norman, but I wouldn't expect Riley to stick around Oklahoma for too long. His debut as the Sooners' offensive coordinator led to nearly 7,000 yards of offense, a Big 12 title, a Heisman-caliber season from his quarterback and College Football Playoff berth. The Texas native is like most Big 12 coaches in that he comes from the Air Raid coaching tree in some capacity, but he likes to run the ball a la Art Briles. I would bet he gets a head-coaching gig fairly soon.

WHICH OF OUR TOP 25 TEAMS ARE YOU MOST SKEPTICAL ABOUT?

Steven Lassan: **STANFORD.** The Cardinal have been able to reload under David Shaw over the past couple of years, but there's a lot to replace this year — both lines of scrimmage, and there's a quarterback question mark. Christian McCaffrey gives them a good foundation to build around, but the Pac-12 North is getting better.

Mitch Light: **NORTH CAROLINA**, and maybe that's a cop-out since we have them in the 20s. It's been well-documented that the defense probably wasn't as good as its numbers suggested last year. Marquise Williams was a great quarterback. I know Mitch Trubisky is a proven backup, but I don't quite trust this program yet.

David Fox: **OHIO STATE.** I have little doubt the Buckeyes are a top-25 team, but tabbing them as a Playoff team is a tough call. I could see this young team rallying around J.T. Barrett, but there are too many chances for Ohio State to slip up and fall out of the Big Ten race. Michigan is getting better, and Michigan State has the Buckeyes' number. This team could finish No. 1 in the country or third in the Big Ten East.

WHAT IS THE MOST INTERESTING NON-CONFERENCE GAME ON THE 2016 SCHEDULE?

Steven Lassan: **OHIO STATE-OKLAHOMA.** It's a game between two likely playoff contenders, and I think we'll learn a lot about Oklahoma and how quickly their defense has reloaded. The same for Ohio State. It's a critical early test for both teams that could mean a lot for playoff positioning.

Braden Gall: **FLORIDA STATE-OLE MISS.** There aren't many preseason top-10 matchups in the non-conference, but 2016 gives us a couple. Florida State and Ole Miss are both expecting to compete for conference championships and possibly more this fall, but one of them will begin the season with a loss right out of the gate — and in Orlando, no less. A close loss doesn't eliminate either from the national title conversation, but you can bet this Week 1 matchup could be a tiebreaker for the selection committee should it come to that. The level of athlete on display in this tilt is must-see TV.

Mitch Light: I'm going to go **OKLAHOMA-HOUSTON** because I think it has such huge implications for Houston. If they win that game, then we have to start talking about them as a legitimate Playoff team. They also host Louisville late in the year, which would be another chance for a huge win.

Satterfield: AP; McCaffrey: Peter Brouillet; Odom: Mizzou Athletics

WHICH PROGRAM WILL BE IN DECLINE IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

Steven Lassan: MISSOURI. Barry Odom was a good hire, but the Tigers face an uphill battle for improvement in 2016. The offense is still a question mark. The defense should be good, but the SEC East is only getting tougher. Tennessee is back among the top 10 and recruiting at a high level once again. Georgia and Florida are trending up. The path to another East title is going to be tough for Missouri.

David Fox: WISCONSIN. The Badgers are coming off a 10-win season, but that was a pretty empty 10-win year. The Badgers probably won't fall off a cliff anytime soon — they're going to have a good offensive line, and that division isn't a gauntlet. But I also wonder if their time as a regular top-25 team is coming to an end. The revolving door of coaches, including coordinator Dave Aranda, has to catch up to them at some point.

Mitch Light: This was a tough one. I'm going to say **OREGON.** I think the North is getting better. Stanford is not going anywhere. Washington is getting better. Washington State is doing well. I don't think the Ducks are going to become irrelevant, but I think their days as a national title contender could be over.

Braden Gall: I hesitate to say this because the offense will always be good in Eugene, but I think the **OREGON DUCKS** are in a position where the division around them is getting significantly better, the conference around them is getting significantly better. I do think the Brady Hoke hire was a good move for Mark Helfrich, but they've lost a lot of bodies on both sides of the ball. The Ducks had their opportunity at a couple of national championships, but there's some danger zone if they continue on this path of falling into that 20-25 range rather than being a top-five program.

WHICH QUARTERBACK BATTLE IS THE MOST INTERESTING?

Braden Gall: NOTRE DAME. You've got two potential star players on a team that could be a playoff contender with a head coach who is an offensive guy who likes to make stars out of his quarterbacks. DeShone Kizer and Malik Zaire are both fantastic players who can be All-America-type good. Both of them are No. 1 guys. You're at a program like Notre Dame as a top-10 team. It's going to be interesting if Brian Kelly handles this like Urban Meyer did last year at Ohio State or if he's going to name a quarterback at the start of the season and stick with it.

Steven Lassan: FLORIDA STATE. They rarely have bad quarterback play under Jimbo Fisher, but the offense was never consistent last year. Sean Maguire and Everett Golson shared the job. Maguire missed spring practice due to an ankle injury. That allowed Malik Henry and Deondre Francois to push for the starting job. The development of Florida State's quarterback will determine if it's Florida State or Clemson who wins the ACC this year.

Mitch Light: NOTRE DAME because you have two proven commodities [DeShone Kizer and Malik Zaire] and two guys they've won with. Neither one of those guys is going to be satisfied with being a backup. Not that there are going to be chemistry issues, but I have no idea what they should do at that position. That's a really tough call for Brian Kelly and that staff.

David Fox: TEXAS. Tyrone Swoopes and Jerrod Heard have been battling this out forever, and now freshman Shane Buechele may be the guy. Throw in the dynamic of a new offensive coordinator and Charlie Strong's job status, and this is a job-saver or job-killer.

WHICH POWER 5 PROJECTED CONFERENCE CHAMPION ARE YOU MOST SKEPTICAL ABOUT?

Braden Gall: WASHINGTON HUSKIES. This is a well-coached team with a lot of nice pieces and players in the right positions. If the Washington Huskies are a potential division or conference champion, it would be considered way ahead of schedule for Chris Petersen. The Huskies have a chance to be a really good team, but I'm not sure they are top-10, top-12 good.

Mitch Light: I'm going to take a different twist on this because I think everyone is going to say Washington. I'm going to say **FLORIDA STATE** because Florida State over Clemson was the most difficult decision we had to make in our predictions meeting. Florida State is obviously a very good team, but I'm not overly confident they will win the ACC because the team they will have to beat out, Clemson, is also one of the best teams in the nation. This will be very interesting to watch, and it will obviously have a huge impact on the national title race.

David Fox: OKLAHOMA. Last year's playoff more or less exposed the Sooners for having never played a Big 12 at full strength at the quarterback position. I think we might have jumped the gun in assuming that OU was the easy pick to win the Big 12. And being the favorite is not a place where Bob Stoops' teams have excelled in the recent past. Picking a team that's rebuilding to that degree on defense in the Big 12 is playing with fire.

WHICH PROGRAM WILL BE ON THE RISE IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

Braden Gall: VIRGINIA TECH. If you look at the last four seasons, it is right at .500 in the ACC, and that's well below what Frank Beamer was used to. With Justin Fuente as the head coach and with Bud Foster back as the defensive coordinator, that's a program that has a lot of bodies in place this year to be successful. If Fuente is as good as we all think he is, this is a program that has a chance to return to its championship level very quickly.

Steven Lassan: WASHINGTON. Chris Petersen is building an annual Pac-12 contender. The Huskies were rebuilding last year, but they were a better team in 2015 than they were in 2014. A lot of young talent played last year. I think they're the favorite to win the North this year,

David Fox: Maybe people already consider **TENNESSEE** to have broken through, and that's fair. Tennessee has gotten better every year under Butch Jones. But I also don't think people are acknowledging what a big deal it would be if Tennessee is the team that breaks the West's hold on the SEC title since 2008. If the Vols can pull that off this season, it would be a remarkable turnaround for a former power.

ATHLON EXPERTS PANEL

TOP College Towns

Be it a savory brat haze floating over State Street, towering Georgia pines surrounding the 40 Watt Club or 1.5 million bats emerging nightly from slumber, the uniqueness of college football is captured by the individuality of the college towns it calls home.

They are literally and figuratively the foundation of the sport.

Madison, Austin and Athens are just three of the dozens of exceptional locales in college football. All of them offer an original experience for college football goers every fall Saturday.

In an effort to determine the top destination, however, *Athlon Sports* asked 10 experts who have traveled the nation for decades visiting these football sanctuaries to rank their favorite places in the country.

THE PANEL

RICK NEUHEISEL, CBS SPORTS/SIRIUSXM
ANDY STAPLES, SI
BRUCE FELDMAN, FOX SPORTS
PAT FORDE, YAHOO!
RALPH RUSSO, AP
DAN RUBENSTEIN, THE SOLID VERBAL
STEWART MANDEL, FOX SPORTS
MATT HAYES, COLLEGE FOOTBALL WRITER
TRAVIS HANEY, ESPN
STEVEN GODFREY, SB NATION

1 ATHENS, GA.

(3 FIRST PLACE VOTES)

Rich in musical history, Athens' natural charm has long lured college football fans to Northeast Georgia. Bordering the evergreen campus to the North, the Downtown District is home to some of the South's best music venues, bars and restaurants. There is a plethora of parks, trails and greenways for those who like the fresh air, but come nightfall, be sure to find your way to The 40 Watt Club or Georgia Theatre for a show. Top it all off with Five Points, a mix of mansions and fine dining.

"It has it all. A great downtown area with a lot of great restaurants and bars, a pretty campus and my favorite football stadium."
– PAT FORDE, YAHOO!

Athens Top: AJ Reynolds/OnlineAthens.com & The Athens Banner-Herald. Bottom: Elements Studio-ADDA; Madison: Andy Manis; Boulder: Downtown Boulder/DBI.org

2 MADISON, WIS.

The second-biggest city and state capital of Wisconsin is home to one of the greatest pedestrian thoroughfares in the nation. State Street connects campus with the downtown Capitol Square that towers over the entire city. Nestled between two gorgeous lakes — Monona and Mendota — Madison is equal parts wonderfully diverse cultural center and booze-fueled shindig featuring the World's Largest Brat Festival and the State Street Halloween Party. An early morning brat haze welcomes fans from across the Big Ten every fall Saturday.

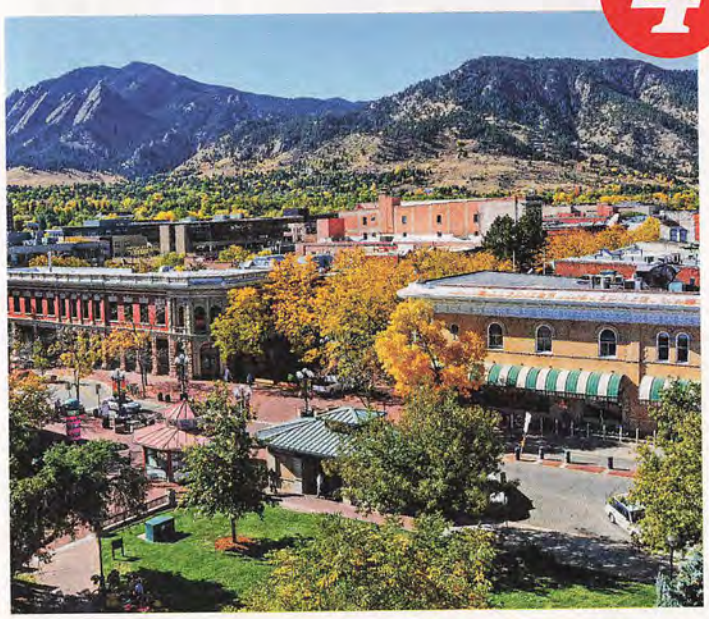
"On game days, the city connects to UW in a manner that's more seamless than any town on this list. You're not sure where gameday ends and Madison begins."
– STEVEN GODFREY, SB NATION

3 AUSTIN, TEXAS
(4 FIRST PLACE VOTES)

An inherently weird and progressive oasis in the heart of Texas, Austin offers big-city activities with a collegiate appeal. The downtown urban campus is surrounded by must-see attractions such as the famous Sixth Street food and music drag, Congress Avenue Bat Bridge and Colorado River. For BBQ, blues and football buffs, the Live Music Capital of the World is a perfect destination — just be sure to dodge the traffic jams and construction cranes.

"So much great everything."
– ANDY STAPLES, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

4 BOULDER, COLO.



Located in the foothills of the great Rocky Mountains, Boulder is one of the most gorgeous college settings in the country. No major college football town is more intertwined with nature and the outdoors than home of the Buffaloes. Which may be why Boulder — with its clean mountain air and mild temperatures — is routinely ranked highly in health, quality of life and general happiness. Take the Chautauqua Trailhead to the top of Green Mountain for a view of Folsom Field; it's a vista few campuses in college football can match.

"Welcome, everyone, to nature. Hippy style. The most walkable campus in all of college sports, from the spectacular views of the Flatirons to the Pearl Street area with its food and shops and vendors, Boulder is a jewel."
– MATT HAYES, COLLEGE FOOTBALL WRITER

Mountain air, mild temperatures, flip flops, ultimate frisbee, and friendly people everywhere.
– DAN RUBENSTEIN, THE SOLID VERBAL

5 ANN ARBOR, MICH.
(1 FIRST PLACE VOTE)

Nicknamed "Tree Town" for its dense forestation, Ann Arbor is a beautiful combination of small college town and growing urban landscape. It's a place steeped in political activism, outdoor activities and Big Blue football. The crisp autumn experience is unlike any found in the rival southern college football locales — and there's a lot more to do here. A lunch stop at Zingerman's is a must (many believe it to be the best deli in the nation) before sliding down to one of the city's many breweries for a nightcap.

"This is a classic Big Ten town with college charm but also doesn't turn into a ghost town 24 hours after a home game."
– BRUCE FELDMAN, FOX SPORTS

7 EUGENE, ORE.
(1 FIRST PLACE VOTE)

Residents can go north to a big city (Portland), west to a gorgeous coastline, east to snowboard (Mt. Bachelor) and south to The Golden State. All within 200 miles. Eugene marks the south end of the Willamette Valley, home to more than 40 breweries and where consuming said beverages is a pastime. In fact, it's so important that "Animal House" was filmed here, and it houses the inspiration for Moe's Tavern from "The Simpsons." Bring a raincoat, but in case you forget yours, swing by Nike's headquarters and pick one up. Eugene is as pristine a college football environment as there is in the country.

"Eugene is just cool; you could get from a hardcore football tailgate to a hemp shop within five minutes."
--STEWART MANDEL, FOX SPORTS

6 OXFORD, MISS.
(1 FIRST PLACE VOTE)

Quintessential is the word that comes to mind when thinking about the college town that houses Ole Miss. The Grove on a Saturday morning is a portrait of college football perfection, complete with the most glamorous and impressive tailgate in the nation. Oxford, known as art center of the South, has a rich literary history. Where else does a bookstore (Square Books) top the list of a city's main attractions? After the game, mosey over to The Square for food, libations and more people watching.

"The square makes you feel like you're in a [John] Grisham novel. It's a really cool spot."
– RICK NEUHEISEL, SIRIUSXM/CBS SPORTS

"Everything you want in a college town. Small, traditional, deep-South charm. It's the hospitality on The Square every day of the week, and the unforgettable fall Saturdays in The Grove. Drive by Faulkner's Rowan Oak home, and soak in the stately south. Hotty Toddy, baby."
– MATT HAYES, COLLEGE FOOTBALL WRITER

Oxford: Phillip Waller; Charlottesville: Charlottesville Albemarle Convention & Visitors Bureau

8 PALO ALTO, CALIF.

This is anything but a typical college town, but it's an awfully cool place to hang out. Cost of living is high, but so is the standard of living — in the community, in the classroom and in the workplace. Nearly the entire student body population lives on campus, and the bars, shops and restaurants are as good (and relaxed) as any other college town in the nation. What makes this place unique, however, is that it's in the heart of Silicon Valley — and, yes, that includes Erlich Bachman, main character on the popular HBO show. It's a city boiling over with future leaders of industry who push the boundaries of how a town should live, work and play. Essentially, this town's "whole corporate culture is that there is no corporate culture." There is no dead weight in this incubator.

"Definitely NOT your average college town. The vibe is more laid-back when it comes to football, which is refreshing. The masses don't lose their minds when the Cardinal lose."
–RALPH RUSSO, ASSOCIATED PRESS

"Everything is beautiful up there. Many great restaurants. The only thing keeping it out of the top five is the bar scene is probably too tame for most looking for a college town."
–BRUCE FELDMAN, FOX SPORTS

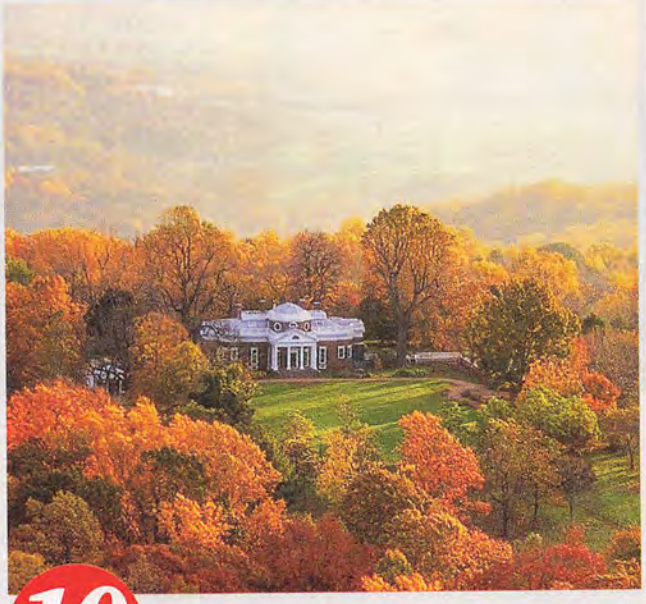
9 CHAPEL HILL, N.C.

Sure, the rolling North Carolina hills are gorgeous and the campus is exemplary, but the food! This town prides itself on its farmers, chefs and Southern flavor. Be it James Beard Award-winning fine dining, or street food festivals, or Sugarland's desserts, or The TOPO (Top of the Hill Restaurant and Brewery) for a nightcap after a big Tar Heel win, this town has a taste for everyone. Just stroll up and down Franklin Street for all of the above, music, movies and much more. It's beautiful, it's cultural and it's uniquely American.

"Bustling Franklin Street with the adjacent campus make for an idyllic setting, both for students and visitors."
– TRAVIS HANEY, ESPN

BEST OF THE REST

11. SEATTLE, WASH.
12. KNOXVILLE, TENN.
13. STATE COLLEGE, PA.
14. BERKELEY, CALIF.
15. BATON ROUGE, LA.



10 CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.

It's hard not to be overcome with a sense of American history when walking through this picturesque college town. Reminders of Thomas Jefferson and both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars are everywhere, including the iconic Rotunda, Lawn and Monticello plantation. Edgar Allen Poe, James Madison, William Faulkner and James Monroe are just a few other historical luminaries to have called Charlottesville home. The classic brick and plaster is ubiquitous, including on the campus, the Downtown Mall and The Corner. Shenandoah National Park and its Skyline Drive offer plenty of outdoor scenery for those who favor nature over one of the city's excellent vineyards or breweries (we recommend South Street).

"It's definitely a nicer, old-money area, but holy wow is it gorgeous, green and idyllic. Feels like a stock photo in the best possible way."
– DAN RUBENSTEIN, THE SOLID VERBAL

FCS TOP 25 PREVIEW

1. NORTH DAKOTA STATE
(13-2, 7-1 MISSOURI VALLEY)
There's no complacency in Fargo even after the FCS dynasty made it five straight national titles — an NCAA all-division record. With 14 returning starters, the Bison are favored to continue the amazing run. Their punishing defense, led by linebacker Nick DeLuca and defensive end Greg Menard, flattens opponents. Four returning starters on the offensive line will do the same for King Frazier and a deep stable of running backs. Quarterback isn't a question mark even after Carson Wentz's graduation because Easton Stick was 8-0 as a redshirt freshman while Wentz was sidelined. The Bison are 71-5 since 2011.

2. SAM HOUSTON STATE
(11-4, 7-2 SOUTHLAND)
All that's left for the Bearkats is a national title — they've reached the semifinals in four of the last five seasons. Playoff standout Jeremiah Briscoe is the starting quarterback after Jared Johnson left for UTSA as a graduate transfer, while running back Corey Avery dominates. Coach K.C. Keeler seeks stronger defense, and defensive end P.J. Hall will be happy to oblige.

3. NORTHERN IOWA
(9-5, 5-3 MISSOURI VALLEY)
UNI is ready to stand up to North Dakota State in the Missouri Valley race and beyond. The Panthers' two returning 1,000-yard rushers, quarterback Aaron Bailey and running back Tyvis Smith, work behind a veteran offensive line. Their defense was hit hard by graduation, but defensive end Karter Schult is back to terrorize opposing quarterbacks.

4. RICHMOND
(10-4, 6-2 COLONIAL)
Junior Kyle Lauletta was No. 2 in the FCS in passing yards (3,598) and combines again with wide receiver Brian Brown. The 2015 national semifinalist Spiders are even more experienced on defense with linebacker Omar Howard and safety David Jones (nine interceptions) among eight returning starters.

5. JACKSONVILLE STATE
(13-2, 8-0 OHIO VALLEY)
Coach John Grass bulked up the schedule (LSU, Coastal Carolina and Liberty) after reaching the national championship game. All-America quarterback Eli Jenkins is returning from shoulder surgery, and his go-to target, Josh Barge, is the Gamecocks' all-time receptions leader. Ends Darius Jackson and LaMichael Fanning (sixth season) front a retooled defense.

6. CHARLESTON SOUTHERN
(10-3, 6-0 BIG SOUTH)
Coach Jamey Chadwell appears destined for a bigger job, but there's an immediate task at hand. The Buccaneers' record-setting defense returns defensive end Anthony Ellis and linebacker Solomon Brown, and a bruising run game features seniors Darius Hammond, Mike Holloway and Ben Robinson.

7. CHATTANOOGA
(9-4, 6-1 SOUTHERN)
The Mocs seek a fourth straight SoCon title, but three-time league Offensive Player of the Year Jacob Huesman is gone, leaving lefthander Alejandro Bennifield to take over at quarterback. The nucleus remains strong with running back Derrick Craine (1,251 yards) and defensive end Keionta Davis (13.5 sacks) coming off Mocs single-season records.

8. SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
(8-4, 5-3 MISSOURI VALLEY)
A standout Jackrabbits team will usher in the inaugural season at 19,340-seat Dana J. Dykhouse Stadium. The quarterback platoon of Zach Lujan and Taryn Christion will feed the ball to wide receiver Jake Wieneke and tight end Dallas Goedert. The defense is strong up the middle with tackle Cole Langer.

9. COASTAL CAROLINA
(9-3, FCS INDEPENDENT IN 2016)
The Chanticleers may struggle to get top 25 support from voters as the former Big South power transitions toward the FBS in 2017. Touchdown machine De'Angelo Henderson will carry the rushing load after the loss of veteran quarterback Alex Ross.

10. THE CITADEL
(9-4, 6-1 SOUTHERN)
Offensive coordinator-turned-head coach Brent Thompson will keep the triple option humming. In QB Dominique Allen and backs Tyler Renew and Cam Jackson, the Bulldogs return three players who gained more than 750 yards. The defense features shutdown corner Dee Delaney.

11. ILLINOIS STATE
(10-3, 7-1 MISSOURI VALLEY)
All eyes are on sophomore quarterback Jake Kolbe and a running back committee as they

Rick Yeatts Photography

take over for the dominating duo of Tre Roberson and Marshaun Coprich, respectively. The other nine offensive starters return, including big-play wide receiver Anthony Warrum.

12. EASTERN WASHINGTON
(6-5, 5-3 BIG SKY)
Wide receiver Cooper Kupp, the 2015 Walter Payton Award Winner, has 58 total TDs in his career. But for the Eagles to rebound from a subpar season, quarterback Jordan West needs more consistency and the defense must tighten for — gulp — an opening stretch of Washington State, North Dakota State and Northern Iowa.

13. WILLIAM & MARY
(9-4, 6-2 COLONIAL)
Physical defense is a staple with the Tribe, but this season quarterback Steve Cluley, tailback Kendell Anderson and wide receiver DeVonte Dedmon will create an offensive mindset. Placekicker Nick Dorka and punter Hunter Windmuller provide a leg up on special teams.

14. JAMES MADISON
(9-3, 6-2 COLONIAL)
With his team desperate for playoff success, new coach Mike Houston is keeping the high-powered spread attack, which gets big production from running backs Khalid Abdullah and Cardon Johnson and wide receiver Brandon Ravenel. Linebacker Andrew Ankrah and cornerback Taylor Reynolds fuel the defense.

15. NORTH DAKOTA
(7-4, 5-3 BIG SKY)
After being one of the last teams left out of the postseason in 2015, the Fighting Hawks are motivated. They also have super sophomore John Santiago, the Big Sky's leader in all-purpose yards, and a schedule that doesn't include Eastern Washington, Montana and Portland State. Playoffs? Indeed.

16. MONTANA
(8-5, 6-2 BIG SKY)
Another tough schedule awaits second-year coach Bob Stitt, whose Grizzlies roared with impressive wins in 2015 (including North Dakota State). Quarterback Brady Gustafson's passing numbers are as big as his 6'7" frame. All-Big Sky defensive tackle Caleb Kidder is one of only three returning starters on defense.

17. MCNEESE STATE
(10-1, 9-0 SOUTHLAND)
There is continuity following Matt Viator's departure to ULM because defensive coordinator Lance Guidry gained the top job. His defense, anchored by 6'2", 335-pound tackle Isaiah Golden, was among the nation's best last season. Junior running back Ryan Ross is ready for a huge season.

18. TOWSON
(7-4, 5-3 CAA FOOTBALL)
The addition of former Oregon quarterback Morgan Mahalak may be just what two-time 1,000-yard rusher Darius Victor and a veteran offense need. The seniors, who barely missed last year's playoffs, were freshmen for the 2013 FCS national runners-up.

19. WESTERN ILLINOIS
(7-6, 5-3 MISSOURI VALLEY)
New coach Charlie Fisher inherits another rugged schedule, but quarterback Trenton Norvell, wide receiver Lance Lenoir and linebacker Brett Taylor are among 17 returning starters. Last season, the Leathernecks became the first 6–5 team to receive an at-large playoff bid.

20. VILLANOVA
(6-5, 5-3 COLONIAL)
Coach Andy Talley, who guided Nova to the 2009 FCS title, enters his 32nd and final season. Dual-threat quarterback Zach Bednarczyk expects to build off his rookie season, and 6'7", 275-pound defensive end Tanoh Kpassagnon will have a finishing touch as a senior.

21. PORTLAND STATE
(9-3, 6-2 BIG SKY)
Beware, San Jose State and Washington, the Vikings took down two FBS programs and had a six-win improvement last year. Portland State lost a lot of key players, but 2015 FCS Coach of the Year Bruce Barnum is glad quarterback Alex Kuresa isn't one of them.

22. YOUNGSTOWN STATE
(5-6, 3-5 MISSOURI VALLEY)
After the Bo Pelini era opened to a disappointing record, the Penguins seek their first playoff bid since 2006. Senior defensive end Derek Rivers already holds the school record with 26 career sacks, while running backs Martin Ruiz and Jody Webb also expect big senior campaigns.

23. COLGATE
(9-5, 6-0 PATRIOT)
Nine starters return on each side of the ball after the Raiders won two playoff games to reach the national quarterfinals. Senior quarterback Jake Melville is a dual-threat, and wideout Alex Greenawalt is a breakout candidate.

24. NORTHERN ARIZONA
(7-4, 5-3 BIG SKY)
Sophomore Case Cookus might be hard-pressed to improve on last year's 37 touchdown passes — an FCS freshman record — but the return of wide receiver Emmanuel Butler (15 TDs) provides a good start. The Lumberjacks were only 2–4 on the road last season.

25. EASTERN KENTUCKY
(6-5, 5-2 OHIO VALLEY)
Quarterback Bennie Coney can dominate a game and will have support from a healthier Ethan Thomas at running back. Missing the playoffs doesn't sit well with the Colonels, so new coach Mark Elder was brought in to get them back there.

FCS ALL-AMERICA TEAM

OFFENSE

QB	ELI JENKINS	6-2/205/SR.	JACKSONVILLE STATE
RB	CHASE EDMONDS	5-9/196/JR.	FORDHAM
RB	KADE HARRINGTON	5-9/190/SR.	LAMAR
FB	TYLER RENEW	5-11/217/SR.	THE CITADEL
WR	COOPER KUPP	6-2/210/SR.	EASTERN WASHINGTON
WR	JAKE WIENEKE	6-4/210/JR.	SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
TE	JORDAN POWELL	6-3/244/SR.	NEW HAMPSHIRE
C	CASEY DUNN	6-3/285/SR.	JACKSONVILLE STATE
G	ZACK JOHNSON	6-4/329/SR.	NORTH DAKOTA STATE
G	COREY LEVIN	6-5/305/SR	CHATTANOOGA
T	JULIE'N DAVENPORT	6-7/315/SR.	BUCKNELL
T	MITCH KIRSCH	6-6/300/SR.	JAMES MADISON

DEFENSE

DE	KEIONTA DAVIS	6-4/260/SR.	CHATTANOOGA
DE	P.J. HALL	6-1/280/JR.	SAM HOUSTON STATE
DT	ISAIAH GOLDEN	6-2/335/JR.	MCNEESE STATE
DT	CALEB KIDDER	6-5/275/SR.	MONTANA
LB	ANDREW ANKRAH	6-4/234/JR.	JAMES MADISON
LB	NICK DELUCA	6-3/245/SR.	NORTH DAKOTA STATE
LB	CHRISTIAN KUNTZ	6-1/220/SR.	DUQUESNE
CB	CASEY DEANDRADE	5-11/212/SR.	NEW HAMPSHIRE
CB	DEE DELANEY	6-1/191/JR.	THE CITADEL
S	DAVID JONES	6-1/187/SR.	RICHMOND
S	DONALD PAYNE	6-1/217/SR.	STETSON

SPECIALISTS

K	NICK DORKA	6-0/180/JR.	WILLIAM & MARY
P	CHRIS FRASER	6-2/211/SR.	CORNELL
KR	LORENZO JEROME	6-0/195/SR.	SAINT FRANCIS
PR	KHRIS GARDIN	5-7/158/JR.	NORTH CAROLINA A&T

MUST-SEE MATCHUPS
AUG. 27 – CHARLESTON SOUTHERN AT NORTH DAKOTA STATE
SEPT. 10 – MONTANA AT NORTHERN IOWA
SEPT. 10 – EASTERN WASHINGTON AT NORTH DAKOTA STATE
OCT. 15 – CHATTANOOGA AT THE CITADEL
OCT. 29 – NORTH DAKOTA STATE AT NORTHERN IOWA
NOV. 19 – RICHMOND AT WILLIAM & MARY

PROJECTED PLAYOFF QUALIFIERS
CHARLESTON SOUTHERN (BIG SOUTH CHAMP)
CHATTANOOGA (SOUTHERN CHAMP)
COLGATE (PATRIOT CHAMP)
DAYTON (PIONEER CHAMP)
DUQUESNE (NORTHEAST CHAMP)
EASTERN WASHINGTON (BIG SKY CHAMP)
ILLINOIS STATE (AT-LARGE BID)
JACKSONVILLE STATE (OHIO VALLEY CHAMP)
JAMES MADISON (AT-LARGE BID)
MCNEESE STATE (AT-LARGE BID)
MONTANA (AT-LARGE BID)
NORTH DAKOTA (AT-LARGE BID)
NORTH DAKOTA STATE (MISSOURI VALLEY CHAMP)
NORTHERN IOWA (AT-LARGE BID)
PORTLAND STATE (AT-LARGE BID)
RICHMOND (CAA CHAMP)
SAM HOUSTON STATE (SOUTHLAND CHAMP)
SOUTH DAKOTA STATE (AT-LARGE BID)
THE CITADEL (AT-LARGE BID)
TOWSON (AT-LARGE BID)
VILLANOVA (AT-LARGE BID)
WESTERN ILLINOIS (AT-LARGE BID)
WILLIAM & MARY (AT-LARGE BID)
YOUNGSTOWN STATE (AT-LARGE BID)

GETTING GAME READY THE RIGHT WAY

The pageantry of college football includes the bands, cheerleaders and mascots, but for many the real show starts about five hours before kickoff, when the tailgate party begins.

On any given Saturday, fans can take part in pre-game festivities all over the country. It doesn't matter whether the teams playing are in Division III or at the top of the FBS food chain. Tailgate fun is a universal experience, and most football fans love being part of a great party.

But some schools do it better than others. Here are some of the finest practitioners of the tailgate arts.

Come One, Come All

Tiger Stadium's capacity is listed at 102,321, but on LSU game days, as many as 40,000 extras jam into Baton Rouge for the party. You can't really blame them. Just about every available inch of real estate on campus is filled with revelers, with The Parade Ground the largest and rowdiest tailgating site. The people make the party, but so does the food. Louisiana favorites like jambalaya, gumbo and just about every kind of deep-fried concoction are available, and there are plenty of options with which to wash it all down. Since LSU is particularly partial to night games, the fun can roll on for hours — and even days, for those who arrive as early as Thursday.

Urban Renewal

When your filled stadium is the third-largest "city" in the state, you can bet there is some hard-core game preparation going on. All of Lincoln is awash in Cornhusker red on normal days, but on Saturdays, the color is turned up, and Nebraskans from all over the state prepare to support their team. This may be the nation's most welcoming venue for opposing fans, thanks to the Huskers' renowned sportsmanship. Revelers jam every possible piece of land around Memorial Stadium and create a unique "Husker City" experience.

LSU: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports; Nebraska: Tim Umphrey; Tennessee: Patrick Murphy-Racey; Washington, Iowa: AP

One If By Land...

There are plenty of solid-ground tailgating options for Washington fans, but those who do it in style would prefer an aquatic theme. The yacht option is, of course, one of the favored versions of seafaring tailgating, but those who don't quite live the lush life will use rowboats, sailboats, dinghies and just about any other possible craft to reach Husky Stadium from adjacent Lake Washington. With the Cascade Mountains forming a perfect backdrop, fans can prepare for the action with parties that don't necessarily set standards for raucous fun but absolutely bring an exciting twist to the art of tailgating.

Naval Maneuvers

If you don't have a seaworthy craft that will allow you to approach Neyland Stadium from the Tennessee River, then why not prepare for a Vols' game by taking to the top of one of the many parking garages surrounding the UT home to watch the sailors head in for the game? There will no doubt be plenty of barbecue and Tennessee whisky to sample, and if you set up early enough, you'll have time to join 40,000 or so friends for the Volunteer Walk, when the team heads to the stadium. Family-friendly fun can also be found at local churches. Just don't forget to pack your orange. No other color will do.

Melrose Place

The main drag leading to Iowa's Kinnick Stadium is Melrose Avenue, and that's where the Iowa tailgate experience fires to life. Things jam up as one gets closer to the Hawkeyes' home, and the lots around the stadium are rich with aromatic barbecue smoke and the sounds of Iowa fans getting ready to watch their team. If you don't have a grill or picnic basket, fear not. The row of food vendors across the street from Kinnick has everything necessary to fill you up, with the Big Ass Turkey Leg a local favorite. This is classic Midwest tailgating, and it's hard to find anything better on a Saturday.

RECIPES

BUFFALO CHICKEN WINGS

Is it football season already? Our Buffalo Chicken Wings are an instant crowd-pleaser with minimal preparation and maximum flavor. You and your friends may be competing over the last one!

Prep Time: 10 Minutes
Cook Time: 50 Minutes

- 24 Sanderson Farms® Chicken Wingettes
- 1 cup hot pepper sauce
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- ½ tablespoon white vinegar
- Blue cheese dressing (optional)
- Carrot and celery sticks (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 425°F.
2. To prepare the buffalo sauce, mix hot pepper sauce, butter and white vinegar in a small bowl.
3. Place chicken wingettes in a bowl; pour half of the buffalo sauce over the chicken and toss to coat.
4. Place chicken on a foil-lined baking sheet and bake, uncovered, in preheated 425°F oven. Put in oven for 35 minutes.
5. Remove chicken from oven, raise oven temperature to 450°F and brush chicken wings with remaining buffalo sauce.
6. Bake chicken for an additional 10 minutes or until chicken reaches an internal temperature of 190°F.
7. Serve with blue cheese dressing and carrot and celery sticks.

Yield: 8 servings

PROVIDED BY

Sanderson Farms®

100% Natural

Nutritional Information per Serving:

- **Calories: 270**
- **Fat: 21g**
- **Saturated Fat: 8g**
- **Sodium: 1120g**
- **Carbohydrate: 1g**
- **Sugars: 1g**
- **Protein: 17g**

Craig Mitchelldyer

Quack Attack

There are plenty of reasons to visit the Pacific Northwest, and over the past couple decades, a big one has been Oregon football. The Ducks are one of the most exciting, entertaining and successful programs in the nation, and the run-up to their games is almost as much fun as their high-speed offensive attack. As many as 5,000 fans pack into the Moshofsky Center, the team's indoor practice facility, before the game for local cuisine, craft beers, cheerleaders and often protection from the rain. Outside, you can sample fare that spans the culinary spectrum from veggie burgers to barbecued ribs. Recently, fans have been able to wash it all down with a victory.

Our fight song only has one lyric: Mmmmm.

When you bite into Sanderson Farms chicken, you'll find there's really nothing more to say. Sure, we could talk about how our chicken is 100% natural, with no added salt, water or other nonsense. But let's just stick to what really matters on game day – taste.

Sanderson Farms®

100% Natural*

Get great recipes at SandersonFarms.com or find us on Facebook.

*No artificial ingredients and minimally processed.

RECIPES

PROVIDED BY

CURLY'S

CHICKEN NACHOS

Prep Time: 10 Minutes
Cook Time: 10 Minutes

- 1 Tub of Curly's Sauceless Chicken
- Bag of corn tortilla chips
- 3 to 4 jalapenos, thinly sliced
- 4½ ounces diced red onion, approximately 1 cup
- 12 ounces finely grated Cheddar, approximately 4½ cups
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh oregano leaves

How To Make:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line a baking pan with parchment paper.
2. Layer the chips on the baking pan.
3. Top chips 1/3 of Curly's Sauceless Chicken tub, diced, with 1/3 of jalapeno slices and sprinkle the chips with 1/3 of the red onions.
4. Repeat for two more layers.
5. Bake in the oven on the bottom rack for 7 minutes or until the cheese begins to bubble
6. Sprinkle with fresh oregano
7. Serve immediately with salsa, sour cream, and guacamole if desired.

BIG HOUSE SAUSAGE

Prep Time: 10 Minutes
Cook Time: 10 Minutes

- 1 Package of Nathan's Smoked Sausage Links
- 1 Tub of Curly's Sauceless Pulled Pork
- 1 Package of Hot Dog buns

How To Make:

1. Grill (or heat in microwave) the Nathan's Smoked Sausage Links.
2. Follow Curly's Pulled Pork microwave cooking instructions on package and remove from microwave (be careful, it's hot!).
3. Place Curly's Smokehouse Link on a bun and add pulled pork on top.
4. Drizzle with your favorite BBQ sauce and enjoy.

BABY BACK RIB CHILI

Time: 3-4 Hours

- 1 (12oz) Can of mixed beans
- 1 (28oz) Can of crushed tomatoes
- 1 lb ground beef
- 1 Pack of Curly's BBQ Ribs
- 1 Packet chili seasoning

Optional - Chili powder, hot sauce, shredded cheese and sour cream

How To Make:

1. Heat ribs in oven at 350 degrees for 20 minutes.
2. Cook the ground beef, breaking up while cooking.
3. Add ground beef, mixed beans, crushed tomatoes, and chili seasoning to slow cooker. Cook on low while ribs are heating in the oven.
4. Once ribs are heated, pull meat apart from the bones and tear into small pieces. Add rib pieces to the ground beef and bean mixture and stir together.
5. Set slow cooker on high and let cook for 3 hours.
6. Optional: For more flavor, add chili powder and hot sauce to your taste.
7. Serve and garnish with sour cream and shredded cheese. Enjoy!

Picture Perfect

Ole Miss fans were delighted when Katy Perry showed up on the College GameDay set a couple years ago, but those who have been tailgating before Rebels games for decades know that no entertainment star can overshadow the beauty of The Grove. The 10-acre campus site comes alive on game days with a menagerie of parties amidst beautiful oak, elm and magnolia trees. The surroundings are beautiful, and many of the fans dress in their sharpest clothes, trying to match the splendor. Fans claim their spots at 9 p.m. the night before a game, and from then on, shouts of "Hotty Toddy!" can be heard, right up until kickoff.

Phillip Waller

CURLY'S®

THRILL WITHOUT THE GRILL

DELICIOUS SLOW COOKER RECIPES

Barbecue Baby Back Ribs

INGREDIENTS:
1 Package of Curly's Baby Back Ribs

INSTRUCTIONS:
Cut Curly's ribs into two bone pieces. Place Curly's Ribs and BBQ sauce from the package into the slow cooker. Place slow cooker on warm and cover. Ready to serve in 3 hours.

FOR MORE MOUTH-WATERING RECIPES, VISIT: CURLYS.COM

TOP 200 RECRUITING REPORT

presented by Wrangler
Real. Comfortable. Jeans.

RANKINGS PROVIDED BY 247COMPOSITE

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Rashan Gary	Paramus Catholic (Plainfield, NJ)	DT	6-5	293	Michigan
2.	Dexter Lawrence	Wake Forest (Wake Forest, NC)	DL	6-5	340	Clemson
3.	Greg Little	Allen (Allen, TX)	OL	6-6	326	Ole Miss
4.	Shea Patterson	IMG Academy (Shreveport, LA)	QB	6-2	198	Ole Miss
5.	Jacob Eason	Lake Stevens (Lake Stevens, WA)	QB	6-5	211	Georgia
6.	Ed Oliver	Westfield (Houston, TX)	DT	6-2	290	Houston
7.	Levonta Taylor	Ocean Lakes (Virginia Beach, VA)	CB	5-11	175	Florida State
8.	Nick Bosa	IMG Academy (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	DL	6-4	265	Ohio State
9.	Derrick Brown	Lanier (Sugar Hill, GA)	DL	6-4	315	Auburn
10.	Ben Davis	Gordo (Gordon, AL)	LB	6-4	240	Alabama
11.	Mique Juarez	North High School (Torrance, CA)	LB	6-2	230	UCLA
12.	Isaac Nauta	IMG Academy (Buford, GA)	TE	6-4	237	Georgia
13.	Mecole Hardman	Elbert County (Bowman, GA)	DB	5-11	180	Georgia
14.	Demetris Robertson	Savannah Christian (Savannah, GA)	WR	5-11	174	--
15.	Lyndell Wilson	Carver (Montgomery, AL)	LB	6-2	240	Alabama
16.	Oluwole Betiku	Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA)	DL	6-3	250	USC
17.	Jonah Williams	Folsom (Folsom, CA)	OL	6-5	290	Alabama
18.	McTelvin Agim	Hope (Texarkana, TX)	DE	6-3	280	Arkansas
19.	Jeffery Simmons	Noxubee County (Macon, MS)	DL	6-4	275	Mississippi State
20.	Miles Sanders	Woodland Hills (Pittsburgh, PA)	RB	5-11	195	Penn State
21.	Kristian Fulton	Archbishop Rummel (Metairie, LA)	DB	6-0	178	LSU
22.	Jack Jones	Long Beach Poly (Long Beach, CA)	DB	5-11	170	USC
23.	Rashard Lawrence	Neville (Monroe, LA)	DT	6-3	310	LSU
24.	Benito Jones	Wayne County (Waynesboro, MS)	DT	6-1	305	Ole Miss
25.	Caleb Kelly	Clovis West (Fresno, CA)	LB	6-3	225	Oklahoma
26.	Antonneous Clayton	Dooly County (Vienna, GA)	DL	6-3	235	Florida
27.	Tommy Kraemer	Elder (Cincinnati, OH)	OL	6-5	310	Notre Dame
28.	Michal Menet	Exeter Township (Birdsboro, PA)	OL	6-4	285	Penn State
29.	Tavien Feaster	Spartanburg (Spartanburg, SC)	RB	6-0	205	Clemson
30.	Marlon Davidson	Greenville (Greenville, AL)	DL	6-3	281	Auburn
31.	Landon Dickerson	South Caldwell (Hickory, NC)	OL	6-5	315	Florida State
32.	Jonathon Cooper	Lincoln (Gahanna, OH)	DE	6-3	224	Ohio State
33.	Tyrie Cleveland	Westfield (Houston, TX)	WR	6-2	194	Florida
34.	Tyler Vaughns	Bishop Amat (Covina, CA)	WR	6-2	180	USC
35.	B.J. Emmons	Freedom (Morganton, NC)	RB	6-0	220	Alabama
36.	Devin Duvernay	Sachse (Sachse, TX)	WR	5-9	195	Baylor
37.	Kaden Smith	Marcus (Flower Mound, TX)	TE	6-5	250	Stanford
38.	A.J. Brown	Starkville (Starkville, MS)	WR	6-1	225	Ole Miss
39.	Ben Bredeson	Arrowhead (Hartland, WI)	OL	6-5	293	Michigan
40.	Brandon Jones	Nacogdoches (Nacogdoches, TX)	DB	6-0	195	Texas
41.	Shane Simmons	DeMatha (Laurel, MD)	DL	6-3	220	Penn State
42.	Baveon Johnson	Lake Gibson (Lakeland, FL)	OL	6-3	346	Florida State
43.	Nate Craig-Myers	Tampa Catholic (Dade City, FL)	WR	6-2	205	Auburn
44.	Demario McCall	North Ridgeville (North Ridgeville, OH)	RB	5-11	180	Ohio State
45.	Chauncey Gardner	Cocoa (Cocoa, FL)	DB	5-11	197	Florida
46.	K.J. Costello	Santa Margarita (Coto de Caza, CA)	QB	6-5	220	Stanford
47.	Saivion Smith	IMG Academy (St. Petersburg, FL)	DB	6-3	191	LSU
48.	Malik Henry	Long Beach Poly (Inglewood, CA)	QB	6-3	185	Florida State
49.	Antwuan Jackson	Cedar Grove (Ellenwood, GA)	DL	6-2	308	Auburn
50.	Patrick Hudson	Silsbee (Silsbee, TX)	OL	6-4	325	Baylor
51.	Brian Burns	American Heritage (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	DE	6-5	222	Florida State
52.	N'Keal Harry	Chandler (Chandler, AZ)	WR	6-4	200	Arizona State
53.	Deontay Anderson	Manvel (Manvel, TX)	DB	6-1	212	Ole Miss
54.	Feleipe Franks	Wakulla (Crawfordville, FL)	QB	6-6	214	Florida
55.	Eric Monroe	North Shore (Houston, TX)	DB	6-0	185	LSU
56.	Justin Madubuike	McKinney North (McKinney, TX)	DL	6-3	245	Texas A&M
57.	Tre Lamar	Roswell (Roswell, GA)	LB	6-4	240	Clemson
58.	Nigel Warrior	Peachtree Ridge (Duluth, GA)	S	6-0	186	Tennessee
59.	Jeffrey McCulloch	Davis (Houston, TX)	LB	6-2	234	Texas
60.	Trayvon Mullen	Coconut Creek (Pompano Beach, FL)	DB	6-3	176	Clemson
61.	Brandon Peters	Avon (Avon, IN)	QB	6-5	210	Michigan
62.	Nigel Knott	Germantown (Madison, MS)	DB	5-11	180	Alabama
63.	Michael Divinity	John Ehret (Marrero, LA)	LB	6-3	224	LSU
64.	Terrell Hall	St. John's (Washington, DC)	LB	6-5	245	Alabama
65.	David Long	Loyola (Los Angeles, CA)	CB	6-0	187	Michigan
66.	Edwin Alexander	St. Thomas Aquinas (Hammond, LA)	DT	6-2	333	LSU
67.	Shavar Manuel	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	DT	6-4	289	Florida State
68.	Julian Rochester	McEachern (Powder Springs, GA)	DL	6-5	327	Georgia
69.	Michael Pittman	Oaks Christian (Woodland Hills, CA)	WR	6-4	210	USC
70.	Curtis Robinson	Mater Dei (Irvine, CA)	LB	6-3	215	Stanford
71.	Shyheim Carter	Kentwood (Kentwood, LA)	CB	6-0	190	Alabama
72.	Kyle Davis	Archer (Loganville, GA)	WR	6-2	208	Auburn
73.	Terrance Davis	DeMatha (Temple Hills, MD)	OL	6-3	320	Maryland
74.	Devin Asiasi	De La Salle (Concord, CA)	TE	6-4	265	Michigan
75.	Erick Fowler	Manor (Manor, TX)	LB	6-1	240	Texas
76.	Austin Mack	Bishop Luers (Ft. Wayne, IN)	WR	6-2	210	Ohio State
77.	Jarrett Guarantano	Bergen Catholic (Lodi, NJ)	QB	6-4	205	Tennessee
78.	Shaq Smith	St. Frances (Towson, MD)	LB	6-3	242	Clemson
79.	Landon Young	Lafayette (Lexington, KY)	OL	6-7	305	Kentucky
80.	Liam Eichenberg	St. Ignatius (Cleveland, OH)	OL	6-6	280	Notre Dame
81.	Lamar Jackson	Franklin (Elk Grove, CA)	DB	6-3	195	Nebraska
82.	Sam Bruce	St. Thomas Aquinas (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	WR	5-8	180	Miami
83.	Raekwon Davis	Meridian (Meridian, MS)	DL	6-7	325	Alabama
84.	E.J. Price	Archer (Dacula, GA)	OL	6-6	325	USC
85.	Janarius Robinson	Bay (Panama City, FL)	DE	6-4	249	Florida State
86.	Tyler Byrd	Naples (Naples, FL)	DB	6-0	195	Tennessee
87.	Dwayne Haskins	The Bullis School (Potomac, MD)	QB	6-3	204	Ohio State
88.	Michael Onwenu	Cass Technical (Detroit, MI)	OL	6-3	350	Michigan
89.	Keandre Jones	Good Counsel (Olney, MD)	LB	6-3	205	Ohio State
90.	Dontavious Jackson	Alief Elsik (Houston, TX)	LB	6-2	252	Florida State
91.	Ben Cleveland	Stephens County (Toccoa, GA)	OL	6-6	345	Georgia
92.	Carter Coughlin	Eden Prairie (Eden Prairie, MN)	LB	6-3	220	Minnesota
93.	Kendell Jones	Shoemaker (Killeen, TX)	DL	6-5	350	Alabama
94.	Jamel Cook	Miami Central (Miami, FL)	DB	6-3	185	USC
95.	Josh King	Hinsdale South (Darien, IL)	DE	6-6	230	Michigan State
96.	Devwah Whaley	Central (Beaumont, TX)	RB	6-0	210	Arkansas
97.	Byron Murphy	Saguaro (Scottsdale, AZ)	DB	5-11	172	Washington
98.	Xavier Kelly	East (Wichita, KS)	DE	6-5	255	Clemson
99.	Binjimen Victor	Coconut Creek (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	WR	6-4	173	Ohio State
100.	Kareem Walker	De Paul Catholic (Wayne, NJ)	RB	6-1	210	Michigan

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	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt	School
101.	Auston Robertson	Wayne (Ft. Wayne, IN)	DE	6-5	260	Michigan State
102.	Theo Howard	Westlake (Westlake Village, CA)	WR	6-0	175	UCLA
103.	Marquez Callaway	Warner Robins (Warner Robins, GA)	DB	6-2	170	Tennessee
104.	Tren'Davian Dickson	Navasota (Navasota, TX)	WR	5-11	175	Baylor
105.	Kellen Diesch	Byron Nelson (Trophy Club, TX)	OL	6-7	283	Texas A&M
106.	Boss Tagaloa	De La Salle (Concord, CA)	DL	6-2	295	UCLA
107.	Donnie Corley	MLK (Detroit, MI)	WR	6-3	185	Michigan State
108.	Shaq Quarterman	Oakleaf (Orange Park, FL)	LB	6-1	239	Miami
109.	Tramonda Moore	John Marshall (Oklahoma City, OK)	OL	6-4	350	Oklahoma State
110.	Javon McKinley	Centennial (Corona, CA)	WR	6-3	205	Notre Dame
111.	Keith Gavin	Wakulla (Crawfordville, FL)	WR	6-3	219	Florida State
112.	DeKaylin Metcalf	Oxford (Oxford, MS)	WR	6-4	206	Ole Miss
113.	Trevon Diggs	Avalon School (Gaithersburg, MD)	WR	6-2	185	Alabama
114.	Chauncey Manac	Clinch County (Fargo, GA)	LB	6-3	255	Georgia
115.	Jordan Elliott	Westside (Houston, TX)	DL	6-3	322	Texas
116.	Jean Delance	North Mesquite (Mesquite, TX)	OL	6-5	299	Texas
117.	John Raridon	Valley (West Des Moines, IA)	OL	6-4	275	Nebraska
118.	Michail Carter	Jackson (Jackson, GA)	DL	6-3	317	Georgia
119.	Dylan Crawford	Santa Margarita (Rancho Santa Margarita, CA)	WR	6-2	183	Michigan
120.	Jake Hausmann	Archbishop Moeller (Cincinnati, OH)	TE	6-5	240	Ohio State
121.	Eli Stove	Niceville (Niceville, FL)	WR	6-0	175	Auburn
122.	Stephen Sullivan	Donaldsonville (Donaldsonville, LA)	WR	6-6	228	LSU
123.	Drake Davis	IMG Academy (Baton Rouge, LA)	WR	6-3	212	LSU
124.	Sewo Olonilua	Kingwood (Humble, TX)	RB	6-3	225	TCU
125.	Breland Brandt	Windward (Los Angeles, CA)	LB	6-5	230	UCLA
126.	Freddie Swain	North Marion (Ocala, FL)	WR	6-0	177	Florida
127.	Michael Jordan	Plymouth (Canton, MI)	OL	6-7	316	Ohio State
128.	Quartney Davis	Langham Creek (Houston, TX)	WR	6-2	181	Texas A&M
129.	Isaiah Chambers	MacArthur (Houston, TX)	DE	6-4	258	TCU
130.	Jordan Fuller	Old Tappan (Old Tappan, NJ)	DB	6-2	200	Ohio State
131.	Lokeni Toailoa	Carter (Rialto, CA)	LB	6-2	240	UCLA
132.	Daelin Hayes	Skyline (Belleville, MI)	LB	6-3	239	Notre Dame
133.	Charlie Woerner	Rabun County (Tiger, GA)	TE	6-5	249	Georgia
134.	Devin White	North Webster (Springhill, LA)	RB	6-1	255	LSU
135.	Lavert Hill	MLK (Detroit, MI)	DB	5-11	175	Michigan
136.	Brendan Ferns	St. Clairsville (St. Clairsville, OH)	LB	6-3	220	West Virginia
137.	Donavaughn Campbell	Ponchatoula (Ponchatoula, LA)	OL	6-5	349	LSU
138.	Scott Bracey	Benedictine (Richmond, VA)	WR	6-2	200	Duke
139.	Cole Van Lanen	Bay Port (Green Bay, WI)	OL	6-5	280	Wisconsin
140.	Trevon Sidney	Bishop Amat (Covina, CA)	WR	5-11	170	USC
141.	Drake Jackson	Woodford County (Versailles, KY)	OL	6-2	302	Kentucky
142.	Camilo Eifler	Bishop O'Dowd (Berkeley, CA)	LB	6-2	214	Washington
143.	Aaron Hansford	St. John's (Washington, DC)	LB	6-2	210	Texas A&M
144.	Krys Barnes	Liberty (Bakersfield, CA)	LB	6-2	225	UCLA
145.	Cornell Powell	Rose (Greenville, NC)	WR	6-1	200	Clemson
146.	Brandon Bowen	Byron Nelson (Trophy Club, TX)	DL	6-4	235	Baylor
147.	Jared Mayden	Sachse (Sachse, TX)	DB	6-0	198	Alabama
148.	Damar Hamlin	Central Catholic (McKees Rocks, PA)	DB	6-1	185	Pitt
149.	Ahmmon Richards	Wellington (Wellington, FL)	WR	6-1	181	Miami
150.	Josh Imatorbhebhe	North Gwinnett (Suwanee, GA)	WR	6-2	210	USC
151.	John Simpson	Ft. Dorchester (North Charleston, SC)	OL	6-4	290	Clemson
152.	George Hill	Hubbard (Youngstown, OH)	RB	5-11	200	Pitt
153.	Carlos Becker III	Osceola (Kissimmee, FL)	CB	6-2	183	Florida State
154.	Amani Bledsoe	Lawrence (Lawrence, KS)	DE	6-5	265	Oklahoma
155.	Naseir Upshur	Imhotep Institute (Philadelphia, PA)	TE	6-2	245	Florida State
156.	Simi Fehoko	Brighton (Sandy, UT)	WR	6-4	190	Stanford
157.	Damian Alloway	Summit (Fontana, CA)	WR	5-10	170	UCLA
158.	Jordan Parker	Pittsburg (Pittsburg, CA)	DB	6-1	170	Oklahoma
159.	Quinnen Williams	Wenonah (Birmingham, AL)	DL	6-4	265	Alabama
160.	Glen Logan	Destrehan (Destrehan, LA)	DT	6-4	284	LSU
161.	Dillon Mitchell	White Station (Memphis, TN)	WR	6-1	190	Oregon
162.	Tyler Gerald	IMG Academy (Sciotoville, OH)	OL	6-5	348	Ohio State
163.	Joshua Hammond	Hallandale (Hallandale, FL)	WR	6-1	179	Florida
164.	Jauan Williams	Archbishop Carroll (Cheltenham, MD)	OL	6-6	296	Florida State
165.	Elijah Holyfield	Woodward Academy (College Park, GA)	RB	5-11	209	Georgia
166.	Karamo Dioubate	Prep Charter (Philadelphia, PA)	DT	6-4	289	Temple
167.	Ahmir Mitchell	Cedar Creek (Egg Harbor City, NJ)	WR	6-3	205	Michigan
168.	Antonio Williams	North Stanly (New London, NC)	RB	5-11	215	Ohio State
169.	Chase Claypool	Abbotsford (Abbotsford, BC)	WR	6-4	215	Notre Dame
170.	Brandon McIlwain	Council Rock North (Newtown, PA)	QB	6-0	198	South Carolina
171.	Jack Allison	Palmetto (Parrish, FL)	QB	6-5	185	Miami
172.	Jaquan Yulee	Indian River (Chesapeake, VA)	LB	6-1	246	Marshall
173.	Willie Allen	John Curtis (River Ridge, LA)	OL	6-6	303	LSU
174.	Octavious Cooley	Laurel (Laurel, MS)	TE	6-3	254	Ole Miss
175.	Deonte Brown	Austin (Decatur, AL)	OL	6-4	350	Alabama
176.	Jalen Hurts	Channelview (Channelview, TX)	QB	6-2	205	Alabama
177.	Chris Owens	Lamar (Arlington, TX)	OL	6-3	315	Alabama
178.	Marquill Osborne	Hough (Cornelius, NC)	DB	5-11	183	Tennessee
179.	Dionte Mullins	Gulliver Prep (Homestead, FL)	WR	5-10	187	Miami
180.	Darian Owens	Clovis West (Fresno, CA)	WR	6-0	190	UCLA
181.	Ellison Jordan	Gilman (Upper Marlboro, MD)	DL	6-0	280	Penn State
182.	Tre Nixon	Viera (Viera, FL)	WR	6-1	170	Ole Miss
183.	Chris Daniels	Trinity (Euless, TX)	DL	6-4	328	Texas
184.	Garrett Rand	Hamilton (Chandler, AZ)	DT	6-2	280	Wisconsin
185.	Dee Anderson	DeSoto (DeSoto, TX)	WR	6-5	194	LSU
186.	Austin Kendall	Cuthbertson (Waxhaw, NC)	QB	6-2	210	Oklahoma
187.	Clark Yarbrough	Woodberry Forest (Rumson, NJ)	OT	6-6	282	Stanford
188.	Shane Buechele	Lamar (Arlington, TX)	QB	6-1	190	Texas
189.	Khalid Kareem	Harrison (Pontiac, MI)	DL	6-4	245	Notre Dame
190.	Luke Farrell	Perry (Perry, OH)	TE	6-6	240	Ohio State
191.	Diondre Overton	Page (Greensboro, NC)	WR	6-5	195	Clemson
192.	Scott Lashley	West Point (West Point, MS)	OL	6-7	325	Alabama
193.	Brandon Burton	Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA)	DB	6-1	200	UCLA
194.	Tristen Wallace	DeSoto (DeSoto, TX)	QB	6-4	235	Oregon
195.	Rahssan Thornton	Shoemaker (Killeen, TX)	LB	6-2	211	LSU
196.	Justin Layne	Benedictine (Richmond Heights, OH)	WR	6-3	170	Michigan State
197.	Cedric Wood	Godby (Tallahassee, FL)	DT	6-3	303	Florida State
198.	Jake Bentley	Opelika (Opelika, AL)	QB	6-4	219	South Carolina
198.	Clyde Chriss	Warren Easton (New Orleans, LA)	WR	6-0	175	Texas A&M
199.	Josh Ball	Stafford (Fredericksburg, VA)	OT	6-8	311	Florida State

BY POSITION RECRUITING REPORT

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QUARTERBACKS

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Shea Patterson	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	6-2	198	Ole Miss
2.	Jacob Eason	Lake Stevens (Lake Stevens, WA)	6-5	211	Georgia
3.	KJ Costello	St. Margarita (Coto de Caza, CA)	6-5	220	Stanford
4.	Malik Henry	Long Beach Poly (Inglewood, CA)	6-3	185	Florida State
5.	Feleipe Franks	Wakulla (Crawfordville, FL)	6-6	214	Florida
6.	Brandon Peters	Avon (Avon, IN)	6-5	210	Michigan
7.	Jarrettt Guarantano	Bergen (Lodi, NJ)	6-4	205	Tennessee
8.	Dwayne Haskins	The Bullis School (Potomac, MD)	6-3	204	Ohio State
9.	Brandon McIlwain	Council Rock North (Newtown, PA)	6-0	198	South Carolina
10.	Jack Allison	Palmetto (Parrish, FL)	6-5	185	Miami
11.	Jalen Hurts	Channelview (Channelview, TX)	6-2	205	Alabama
12.	Austin Kendall	Cuthbertson (Waxhaw, NC)	6-2	210	Oklahoma
13.	Shane Buechele	Lamar (Arlington, TX)	6-1	190	Texas
14.	Tristen Wallace	DeSoto (DeSoto, TX)	6-4	235	Oregon
15.	Jake Bentley	Opelika (Opelika, AL)	6-4	219	South Carolina
16.	Patrick O'Brien	San Juan Hills (San Juan Capistrano, CA)	6-4	225	Nebraska
17.	Khalil Tate	Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA)	6-2	206	Arizona
18.	Jawon Pass	Carver (Columbus, GA)	6-4	209	Louisville
19.	Woody Barrett	West Orange (Orlando, FL)	6-2	225	Auburn
20.	Zerrick Cooper	Jonesboro (Jonesboro, GA)	6-4	206	Clemson
21.	Messiah deWeaver	Wayne (Dayton, OH)	6-4	215	Michigan State
22.	Devon Modster	Tesoro (Las Flores, CA)	6-2	215	UCLA
23.	Chazz Surratt	East Lincoln (Denver, NC)	6-3	210	North Carolina
24.	Dillon Sterling-Cole	Westfield (Houston, TX)	6-3	200	Arizona State
25.	Max Gilliam	Thousand Oaks (Thousand Oaks, CA)	6-3	190	Cal
26.	Terry Wilson	Del City (Del City, OK)	6-2	187	Oregon
27.	Seth Green	Allen (Allen, TX)	6-3	215	Minnesota
28.	Zach Smith	Grandview (Grandview, TX)	6-3	223	Baylor
29.	Skylar Thompson	Fort Osage (Independence, MO)	6-2	195	Kansas State
30.	Logan Byrd	Veterans (Warner Robins, GA)	6-3	229	North Carolina

WIDE RECEIVERS

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Demetris Robertson	Savannah Christian (Savannah, GA)	5-11	174	--
2.	Tyrie Cleveland	Westfield (Houston, TX)	6-2	194	Florida
3.	Tyler Vaughns	Bishop Amat (Covina, CA)	6-2	180	USC
4.	Devin Duvernay	Sachse (Sachse, TX)	5-9	195	Baylor
5.	A.J. Brown	Starkville (Starkville, MS)	6-1	225	Ole Miss
6.	Nate Craig-Myers	Tampa Catholic (Dade City, FL)	6-2	205	Auburn
7.	N'Keal Harry	Chandler (Chandler, AZ)	6-4	200	Arizona State
8.	Michael Pittman	Oaks Christian (Woodland Hills, CA)	6-4	210	USC
9.	Kyle Davis	Archer (Loganville, GA)	6-2	208	Auburn
10.	Austin Mack	Bishop Luers (Ft. Wayne, IN)	6-2	210	Ohio State
11.	Sam Bruce	St. Thomas Aquinas (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	5-8	180	Miami
12.	Binjimen Victor	Coconut Creek (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	6-4	173	Ohio State
13.	Theo Howard	Westlake (Westlake Village, CA)	6-0	175	UCLA
14.	Tren'Davian Dickson	Navasota (Navasota, TX)	5-11	175	Baylor
15.	Donnie Corley	MLK (Detroit, MI)	6-3	185	Michigan State
16.	Javon McKinley	Centennial (Corona, CA)	6-3	205	Notre Dame
17.	Keith Gavin	Wakulla (Crawfordville, FL)	6-3	219	Florida State
18.	DeKaylin Metcalf	Oxford (Oxford, MS)	6-4	206	Ole Miss
19.	Trevon Diggs	Avalon School (Gaithersburg, MD)	6-2	185	Alabama
20.	Dylan Crawford	Santa Margarita (Rancho Santa Margarita, CA)	6-2	183	Michigan
21.	Eli Stove	Niceville (Niceville, FL)	6-0	175	Auburn
22.	Stephen Sullivan	Donaldsonville (Donaldsonville, LA)	6-6	228	LSU
23.	Drake Davis	IMG Academy (Baton Rouge, FL)	6-3	212	LSU
24.	Freddie Swain	North Marion (Ocala, FL)	6-0	177	Florida
25.	Quartney Davis	Langham Creek (Houston, TX)	6-2	181	Texas A&M
26.	Scott Bracey	Benedictine (Richmond, VA)	6-2	200	Duke
27.	Trevon Sidney	Bishop Amat (Covina, CA)	5-11	170	USC
28.	Cornell Powell	Rose (Greenville, NC)	6-1	200	Clemson
29.	Ahmmon Richards	Wellington (Wellington, FL)	6-1	181	Miami
30.	Josh Imatorbhebhe	North Gwinnett (Suwanee, GA	6-2	210	USC

RUNNING BACKS

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Miles Sanders	Woodland Hills (Pittsburgh, PA)	5-11	195	Penn State
2.	Tavien Feaster	Spartanburg (Spartanburg, SC)	6-0	205	Clemson
3.	B.J. Emmons	Freedom (Morganton, NC)	6-0	220	Alabama
4.	Demario McCall	North Ridgeville (North Ridgeville, OH)	5-11	180	Ohio State
5.	Devwah Whaley	Central (Beaumont, TX)	6-0	210	Arkansas
6.	Kareem Walker	De Paul Catholic (Wayne, NJ)	6-1	210	Michigan
7.	Sewo Olonilua	Kingwood (Humble, TX)	6-3	225	TCU
8.	Devin White	North Webster (Springhill, LA)	6-1	255	LSU
9.	George Hill	Hubbard (Youngstown, OH)	5-11	200	Pitt
10.	Elijah Holyfield	Woodward Academy (College Park, GA)	5-11	209	Georgia
11.	Antonio Williams	North Stanly (New London, NC)	5-11	215	Ohio State
12.	Vavae Malepeai	Mililani (Aiea, HI)	5-11	195	USC
13.	Amir Rasul	Coral Gables (Miami, FL)	5-10	200	Florida State
14.	Sean McGrew	St. John Bosco (Torrance, CA)	5-8	175	Washington
15.	D'Vaughn Pennamon	Manvel (Manvel, TX)	5-11	220	Ole Miss
16.	Travis Homer	Oxbridge (West Palm Beach, FL)	5-11	180	Miami
17.	Kameron Martin	Memorial (Port Arthur, TX)	5-9	180	Baylor
18.	Kyle Porter	Katy (Katy, TX)	5-10	207	Texas
19.	Carlin Fils-Aime	Naples (Naples, FL)	5-11	180	Tennessee
20.	Trayveon Williams	C.E. King (Houston, TX)	5-9	185	Texas A&M
21.	Tony Jones Jr.	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	5-10	216	Notre Dame
22.	Justin Connor	North Panola (Sardis, MS)	5-11	190	Ole Miss
23.	Abdul Adams	Hillside (Landover, MD)	5-11	205	Oklahoma
24.	Chris Evans	Ben Davis (Indianapolis, IN)	5-11	186	Michigan
25.	Beau Bisharat	Jesuit (Sacramento, CA)	6-2	210	Colorado
26.	Demetric Felton	Great Oak (Temecula, CA)	5-10	170	UCLA
27.	Kentrail Moran	O'Fallon (O'Fallon, IL)	5-10	192	--
28.	Trevor Speights	Memorial (Mcallen, TX)	5-10	200	Stanford
29.	Brandon Stephens	Plano (Plano, TX)	6-0	201	UCLA
30.	Matthew Falcon	Southfield (Southfield, MI)	6-1	215	Western Michigan

TIGHT ENDS

	Player	High School (Hometown	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Isaac Nauta	IMG Academy (Buford, GA)	6-4	237	Georgia
2.	Kaden Smith	Marcus (Flower Mound, TX)	6-5	250	Stanford
3.	Devin Asiasi	De La Salle (Concord, CA)	6-4	265	Michigan
4.	Jake Hausmann	Archbishop Moeller (Cincinnati, OH)	6-5	240	Ohio State
5.	Charlie Woerner	Rabun County (Tiger, GA)	6-5	249	Georgia
6.	Naseir Upshur	Imhotep Institute (Philadelphia, PA)	6-2	245	Florida State
7.	Octavious Cooley	Laurel (Laurel, MS)	6-3	254	Ole Miss
8.	Luke Farrell	Perry (Perry, OH)	6-6	240	Ohio State
9.	Landon Rice	Calhoun (Rome, GA)	6-5	246	Auburn
10.	Jamal Pettigrew	St. Augustine (New Orleans, LA)	6-6	218	LSU

AP

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

Player	High School (Hometown)	Ht	Wt	School
1. Greg Little	Allen (Allen, TX)	6-6	326	Ole Miss
2. Jonah Williams	Folsom (Folsom, CA)	6-5	290	Alabama
3. Tommy Kraemer	Elder (Cincinnati, OH)	6-5	310	Notre Dame
4. Michal Menet	Exeter Township (Birdsboro, PA)	6-4	285	Penn State
5. Landon Dickerson	South Caldwell (Hickory, NC)	6-5	315	Florida State
6. Ben Bredeson	Arrowhead (Hartland, WI)	6-5	293	Michigan
7. Baveon Johnson	Lake Gibson (Lakeland, FL)	6-3	346	Florida State
8 Patrick Hudson	Silsbee, TX (Silsbee, TX)	6-4	325	Baylor
9. Terrance Davis	DeMatha (Temple Hills, MD)	6-3	320	Maryland
10. Landon Young	Lafayette (Lexington, KY)	6-7	305	Kentucky
11. Liam Eichenberg	St. Ignatius (Cleveland, OH)	6-6	280	Notre Dame
12. E.J. Price	Archer (Dacula, GA)	6-6	325	USC
13. Michael Onwenu	Cass Technical (Detroit, MI)	6-3	350	Michigan
14. Ben Cleveland	Stephens County (Toccoa, GA)	6-6	345	Georgia
15. Kellen Diesch	Byron Nelson (Trophy Club, TX)	6-7	283	Texas A&M
16. Tramonda Moore	John Marshall (Oklahoma City, OK)	6-4	350	Oklahoma State
17. Jean Delance	North Mesquite (Mesquite, TX)	6-5	299	Texas
18. John Raridon	Valley (West Des Moines, IA)	6-4	275	Nebraska
19. Michael Jordan	Plymouth (Canton, MI)	6-7	316	Ohio State
20. Donavaughn Campbell	Ponchatoula (Ponchatoula, LA)	6-5	349	LSU
21. Cole Van Lanen	Bay Port (Green Bay, WI)	6-5	280	Wisconsin
22. Drake Jackson	Woodford County (Versailles, KY)	6-2	302	Kentucky
23. John Simpson	Ft. Dorchester (North Charleston, SC)	6-4	290	Clemson
24. Tyler Gerald	IMG Academy (Sciotoville, OH)	6-5	348	Ohio State
25. Jauan Williams	Archbishop Carroll (Cheltenham, MD)	6-6	296	Florida State
26. Willie Allen	John Curtis (River Ridge, LA)	6-6	303	LSU
27. Deonte Brown	Austin (Decatur, AL)	6-4	350	Alabama
28. Chris Owens	Lamar (Arlington, TX)	6-3	315	Alabama
29. Clark Yarbrough	Woodberry Forest (Rumson, NJ)	6-6	282	Stanford
30. Scott Lashley	West Point (West Point, MS)	6-7	325	Alabama

LINEBACKERS

Player	High School (Hometown)	Ht	Wt	School
1. Ben Davis	Gordo (Gordo, AL)	6-4	240	Alabama
2. Mique Juarez	North High School (Torrance, CA)	6-2	230	UCLA
3. Lyndell Wilson	Carver (Montgomery, AL)	6-2	240	Alabama
4. Caleb Kelly	Clovis West (Fresno, CA)	6-3	225	Oklahoma
5. Tre Lamar	Roswell (Roswell, GA)	6-4	240	Clemson
6. Jeffrey McCulloch	Davis (Houston, TX)	6-2	234	Texas
7. Michael Divinity	John Ehret (Marrero, LA)	6-3	224	LSU
8. Terrell Hall	St. John's (Washington, DC)	6-5	245	Alabama
9. Curtis Robinson	Mater Dei (Irvine, CA)	6-3	215	Stanford
10. Erick Fowler	Manor (Manor, TX)	6-1	240	Texas
11. Shaq Smith	St. Frances (Towson, MD)	6-3	242	Clemson
12. Keandre Jones	Good Counsel (Olney, MD)	6-3	205	Ohio State
13. Dontavious Jackson	Alief Elsik (Houston, TX)	6-2	252	Florida State
14. Carter Coughlin	Eden Prairie (Eden Prairie, MN)	6-3	220	Minnesota
15. Shaquille Quarterman	Oakleaf (Orange Park, FL)	6-1	239	Miami
16. Chauncey Manac	Clinch County (Fargo, GA)	6-3	255	Georgia
17. Breland Brandt	Windward (Los Angeles, CA)	6-5	230	UCLA
18. Lokeni Toailoa	Carter (Rialto, CA)	6-2	240	UCLA
19. Daelin Hayes	Skyline (Belleville, MI)	6-3	239	Notre Dame
20. Brendan Ferns	St. Clairsville (St. Clairsville, OH)	6-3	220	West Virginia
21. Camilo Eifler	Bishop O'Dowd (Berkeley, CA)	6-2	214	Washington
22. Aaron Hansford	St. John's College (Washington, DC)	6-2	210	Texas A&M
23. Krys Barnes	Liberty (Bakersfield, CA)	6-2	225	UCLA
24. Jaquan Yulee	Indian River (Chesapeake, VA)	6-1	246	Marshall
25. Rahssan Thornton	Shoemaker (Killeen, TX)	6-2	211	LSU
26. Mark Jackson Jr.	Steele (Cibolo, TX)	6-3	235	Oklahoma
27. Josh Brown	Mallard Creek (Charlotte, NC)	6-2	206	Florida State
28. Keion Joyner	Havelock (Havelock, NC)	6-3	200	Florida State
29. Daniel Bituli	Nashville Christian (Antioch, TN)	6-4	230	Tennessee
30. Bryce Youngquist	Los Osos (Rancho Cucamonga, CA)	6-1	215	Oklahoma

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN

Player	High School (Hometown)	Ht	Wt	School
1. Rashan Gary	Paramus Catholic (Plainfield, NJ)	6-5	293	Michigan
2. Dexter Lawrence	Wake Forest (Wake Forest, NC)	6-5	340	Clemson
3. Ed Oliver	Westfield (Houston, TX)	6-2	290	Houston
4. Nick Bosa	IMG Academy (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	6-4	265	Ohio State
5. Derrick Brown	Lanier (Sugar Hill, GA)	6-4	315	Auburn
6. Oluwole Betiku	Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA)	6-3	250	USC
7. McTelvin Agim	Hope (Texarkana, TX)	6-3	280	Arkansas
8. Jeffery Simmons	Noxubee County (Macon, MS)	6-4	275	Mississippi State
9. Rashard Lawrence	Neville (Monroe, LA)	6-3	310	LSU
10. Benito Jones	Wayne County (Waynesboro, MS)	6-1	305	Ole Miss
11. Antonneous Clayton	Dooly County (Vienna, GA)	6-3	235	Florida
12. Marlon Davidson	Greenville (Greenville, AL)	6-3	281	Auburn
13. Jonathon Cooper	Gahanna Lincoln (Gahanna, OH)	6-3	224	Ohio State
14. Shane Simmons	DeMatha (Laurel, MD)	6-3	220	Penn State
15. Antwuan Jackson	Cedar Grove (Ellenwood, GA)	6-2	308	Auburn
16. Brian Burns	American Heritage (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	6-5	222	Florida State
17. Justin Madubuike	McKinney North (McKinney, TX)	6-3	245	Texas A&M
18. Edwin Alexander	St. Thomas Aquinas (Hammond, LA)	6-2	333	LSU
19. Shavar Manuel	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	6-4	289	Florida State
20. Julian Rochester	McEachern (Powder Springs, GA)	6-5	327	Georgia
21. Raekwon Davis	Meridian (Meridian, MS)	6-7	325	Alabama
22. Janarius Robinson	Bay (Panama City, FL)	6-4	249	Florida State
23. Kendell Jones	Shoemaker (Killeen, TX)	6-5	350	Alabama
24. Josh King	Hinsdale South (Darien, IL)	6-6	230	Michigan State
25. Xavier Kelly	East (Wichita, KS)	6-5	255	Clemson
26. Auston Robertson	Wayne (Ft. Wayne, IN)	6-5	260	Michigan State
27. Boss Tagaloa	De La Salle (Concord, CA)	6-2	295	UCLA
28. Jordan Elliott	Westside (Houston, TX)	6-3	322	Texas
29. Michail Carter	Jackson (Jackson, GA)	6-3	317	Georgia
30. Isaiah Chambers	MacArthur (Houston, TX)	6-4	258	TCU

DEFENSIVE BACKS

Player	High School (Hometown)	Ht	Wt	School
1. Levonta Taylor	Ocean Lakes (Virginia Beach, VA)	5-11	175	Florida State
2. Mecole Hardman	Elbert County (Bowman, GA)	5-11	180	Georgia
3. Kristian Fulton	Archbishop Rummel (Metairie, LA)	6-0	178	LSU
4. Jack Jones	Long Beach Poly (Long Beach, CA)	5-11	170	USC
5. Brandon Jones	Nacogdoches (Nacogdoches, TX)	6-0	195	Texas
6. Chauncey Gardner	Cocoa (Cocoa, FL)	5-11	197	Florida
7. Saivion Smith	IMG Academy (St. Petersburg, FL)	6-3	191	LSU
8. Deontay Anderson	Manvel (Manvel, TX)	6-1	212	Ole Miss
9. Eric Monroe	North Shore (Houston, TX)	6-0	185	LSU
10. Nigel Warrior	Peachtree Ridge (Duluth, GA)	6-0	186	Tennessee
11. Trayvon Mullen	Coconut Creek (Pompano Beach, FL)	6-3	176	Clemson
12. Nigel Knott	Germantown (Madison, MS)	5-11	180	Alabama
13. David Long	Loyola (Los Angeles, CA)	6-0	187	Michigan
14. Shyheim Carter	Kentwood (Kentwood, LA)	6-0	190	Alabama
15. Lamar Jackson	Franklin (Elk Grove, CA)	6-3	195	Nebraska
16. Tyler Byrd	Naples (Naples, FL)	6-0	195	Tennessee
17. Jamel Cook	Miami Central (Miami, FL)	6-3	185	USC
18. Byron Murphy	Saguaro (Scottsdale, AZ)	5-11	172	Washington
19. Marquez Callaway	Warner Robins (Warner Robins, GA)	6-2	170	Tennessee
20. Jordan Fuller	Old Tappan (Old Tappan, NJ)	6-2	200	Ohio State
21. Lavert Hill	Detroit MLK (Detroit, MI)	5-11	175	Michigan
22. Jared Mayden	Sachse (Sachse, TX)	6-0	198	Alabama
23. Damar Hamlin	Central Catholic (McKees Rocks, PA)	6-1	185	Pitt
24. Carlos Becker III	Osceola (Kissimmee, FL)	6-2	183	Florida State
25. Jordan Parker	Pittsburg (Pittsburgh, CA)	6-1	170	Oklahoma
26. Marquill Osborne	Hough (Cornelius, NC)	5-11	183	Tennessee
27. Brandon Burton	Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA	6-1	200	UCLA
28. Joejuan Williams	Hendersonville (Hendersonville, TN)	6-2	195	Vanderbilt
29. Jaylon Jones	Allen (Allen, TX)	5-11	182	Ole Miss
30. Andraez Williams	Calvary Baptist (Shreveport, LA)	6-2	166	LSU

BY CONFERENCE RECRUITING REPORT

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ACC

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Dexter Lawrence	Wake Forest (Wake Forest, NC)	DL	6-5	340	Clemson
2.	Levonta Taylor	Ocean Lakes (Virginia Beach, VA)	CB	5-11	175	Florida State
3.	Tavien Feaster	Spartanburg (Spartanburg, SC)	RB	6-0	205	Clemson
4.	Landon Dickerson	South Caldwell (Hickory, NC)	OL	6-5	315	Florida State
5.	Baveon Johnson	Lake Gibson (Lakeland, FL)	OL	6-3	346	Florida State
6.	Malik Henry	Long Beach Poly (Inglewood, CA)	QB	6-3	185	Florida State
7.	Brian Burns	American Heritage (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	DE	6-5	222	Florida State
8.	Tre Lamar	Roswell (Roswell, GA)	LB	6-4	240	Clemson
9.	Trayvon Mullen	Coconut Creek (Pompano Beach, FL)	DB	6-3	176	Clemson
10.	Shavar Manuel	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	DT	6-4	289	Florida State
11.	Shaq Smith	St. Frances (Towson, MD)	LB	6-3	242	Clemson
12.	Sam Bruce	St. Thomas Aquinas (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	WR	5-8	180	Miami
13.	Janarius Robinson	Bay (Panama City, FL)	DE	6-4	249	Florida State
14.	Dontavious Jackson	Alief Elsik (Houston, TX)	LB	6-2	252	Florida State
15.	Xavier Kelly	East (Wichita, KS)	DE	6-5	255	Clemson
16.	Shaquille Quarterman	Oakleaf (Orange Park, FL)	LB	6-1	239	Miami
17.	Keith Gavin	Wakulla (Crawfordville, FL)	WR	6-3	219	Florida State
18.	Scott Bracey	Benedictine (Richmond, VA)	WR	6-2	200	Duke
19.	Cornell Powell	Rose (Greenville, NC)	WR	6-1	200	Clemson
20.	Damar Hamlin	Central Catholic (McKees Rocks, PA)	DB	6-1	185	Pitt
21.	Ahmmon Richards	Wellington (Wellington, FL)	WR	6-1	181	Miami
22.	John Simpson	Ft. Dorchester (North Charleston, SC)	OL	6-4	290	Clemson
23.	George Hill	Hubbard (Youngstown, OH)	RB	5-11	200	Pitt
24.	Carlos Becker III	Osceola (Kissimmee, FL)	CB	6-2	183	Florida State
25.	Naseir Upshur	Imhotep Institute (Philadelphia, PA)	TE	6-2	245	Florida State
26.	Jauan Williams	Archbishop Carroll (Cheltenham, MD)	OL	6-6	296	Florida State
27.	Jack Allison	Palmetto (Parrish, FL)	QB	6-5	185	Miami
28.	Dionte Mullins	Gulliver Prep (Homestead, FL)	WR	5-10	187	Miami
29.	Diondre Overton	Page (Greensboro, NC)	WR	6-5	195	Clemson
30.	Cedric Wood	Godby (Tallahassee, FL)	DT	6-3	303	Florida State
31.	Josh Ball	Stafford (Fredericksburg, VA)	OT	6-8	311	Florida State
32.	Josh Brown	Mallard Creek (Charlotte, NC)	LB	6-2	206	Florida State
33.	Jawon Pass	Carver (Columbus, GA)	QB	6-4	209	Louisville
34.	Keion Joyner	Havelock (Havelock, NC)	LB	6-3	200	Florida State
35.	Tavares Chase	Plant City (Plant City, FL)	WR	6-2	167	Clemson
36.	Joe Jackson	Gulliver Prep (Homestead, FL)	DE	6-5	245	Miami
37.	Amir Rasul	Coral Gables (Miami, FL)	RB	5-10	200	Florida State
38.	Zerrick Cooper	Jonesboro (Jonesboro, GA)	QB	6-4	206	Clemson
39.	Travis Homer	Oxbridge (West Palm Beach, FL)	RB	5-11	195	Miami
40.	Zach McCloud	Santaluces (Lake Worth, FL)	LB	6-2	218	Miami

BIG TEN

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Rashan Gary	Paramus Catholic (Plainfield, NJ)	DT	6-5	293	Michigan
2.	Nick Bosa	IMG Academy (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	DL	6-4	265	Ohio State
3.	Miles Sanders	Woodland Hills (Pittsburgh, PA)	RB	5-11	195	Penn State
4.	Michal Menet	Exeter Township (Birdsboro, PA)	OL	6-4	285	Penn State
5.	Jonathon Cooper	Lincoln (Gahanna, OH)	DE	6-3	224	Ohio State
6.	Ben Bredeson	Arrowhead (Hartland, WI)	OL	6-5	293	Michigan
7.	Shane Simmons	DeMatha (Laurel, MD)	DL	6-3	220	Penn State
8.	Demario McCall	North Ridgeville (North Ridgeville, OH)	RB	5-11	180	Ohio State
9.	Brandon Peters	Avon (Avon, IN)	QB	6-5	210	Michigan
10.	David Long	Loyola (Los Angeles, CA)	CB	6-0	187	Michigan
11.	Terrance Davis	DeMatha (Temple Hills, MD)	OL	6-3	320	Maryland
12.	Devin Asiasi	De La Salle (Concord, CA)	TE	6-4	265	Michigan
13.	Austin Mack	Bishop Luers (Ft. Wayne, IN)	WR	6-2	210	Ohio State
14.	Lamar Jackson	Franklin (Elk Grove, CA)	DB	6-3	195	Nebraska
15.	Dwayne Haskins	The Bullis School (Potomac, MD)	QB	6-3	204	Ohio State
16.	Michael Onwenu	Cass Technical (Detroit, MI)	OL	6-3	350	Michigan
17.	Keandre Jones	Good Counsel (Olney, MD)	LB	6-3	205	Ohio State
18.	Carter Coughlin	Eden Prairie (Eden Prairie, MN)	LB	6-3	220	Minnesota
19.	Josh King	Hinsdale South (Darien, IL)	DE	6-6	245	Michigan State
20.	Binjimen Victor	Coconut Creek (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	WR	6-4	173	Ohio State
21.	Kareem Walker	De Paul Catholic (Wayne, NJ)	RB	6-1	210	Michigan
22.	Auston Robertson	Wayne (Fort Wayne, IN)	DE	6-5	260	Michgian State
23.	Donnie Corley	MLK (Detroit, MI)	WR	6-3	185	Michigan State
24.	John Raridon	Valley (West Des Moines, IA)	OL	6-4	275	Nebraska
25.	Dylan Crawford	Santa Margarita (Rancho Santa Margarita, CA)	WR	6-2	183	Michigan
26.	Jake Hausmann	Archbishop Moeller (Cincinnati, OH)	TE	6-5	240	Ohio State
27.	Michael Jordan	Plymouth (Canton, MI)	OL	6-7	316	Ohio State
28.	Jordan Fuller	Old Tappan (Old Tappan, NJ)	DB	6-2	200	Ohio State
29.	Lavert Hill	Detroit MLK (Detroit, MI)	DB	5-11	175	Michigan
30.	Cole Van Lanen	Bay Port (Green Bay, WI)	OL	6-5	280	Wisconsin
31.	Tyler Gerald	IMG Academy (Sciotoville, OH)	OL	6-5	348	Ohio State
32.	Ahmir Mitchell	Cedar Creek (Egg Harbor, NJ)	WR	6-3	205	Michigan
33.	Antonio Williams	North Stanly (New London, NC)	RB	5-11	215	Ohio State
34.	Ellison Jordan	Gilman (Upper Marlboro, MD)	DL	6-0	280	Penn State
35.	Garrett Rand	Hamilton (Chandler, AZ)	DT	6-2	280	Wisconsin
36.	Luke Farrell	Perry (Perry, OH)	TE	6-6	240	Ohio State
37.	Justin Layne	Benedictine (Richmond Heights, OH)	WR	6-3	170	Michigan State
38.	Patrick O'Brien	San Juan Hills (San Juan Capistrano, CA)	QB	6-4	225	Nebraska
39.	Naquan Jones	Evanston (Mt. Prospect, IL)	DT	6-4	320	Michigan State
40.	Trishton Jackson	West Bloomfield (West Bloomfield, MI)	WR	6-3	190	Michigan State

BIG 12

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Caleb Kelly	Clovis West (Fresno, CA)	LB	6-3	225	Oklahoma
2.	Devin Duvernay	Sachse (Sachse, TX)	WR	5-9	195	Baylor
3.	Brandon Jones	Nacogdoches (Nacogdoches, TX)	DB	6-0	195	Texas
4.	Patrick Hudson	Silsbee (Silsbee, TX)	OL	6-4	325	Baylor
5.	Jeffrey McCulloch	Davis (Houston, TX)	LB	6-2	234	Texas
6.	Erick Fowler	Manor (Manor, TX)	LB	6-1	240	Texas
7.	Tren'Davian Dickson	Navasota (Navasota, TX)	WR	5-11	175	Baylor
8.	Tramonda Moore	John Marshall (Oklahoma City, OK)	OL	6-4	350	Oklahoma State
9.	Jordan Elliott	Westside (Houston, TX)	DL	6-3	322	Texas
10.	Jean Delance	North Mesquite (Mesquite, TX)	OL	6-5	299	Texas
11.	Sewo Olonilua	Kingwood (Humble, TX)	RB	6-3	225	TCU
12.	Isaiah Chambers	MacArthur (Houston, TX)	DE	6-4	258	TCU
13.	Brendan Ferns	St. Clairsville (St. Clairsville, OH)	LB	6-3	220	West Virginia
14.	Brandon Bowen	Byron Nelson (Trophy Club, TX)	DL	6-4	235	Baylor
15.	Amani Bledsoe	Lawrence (Lawrence, KS)	DE	6-5	265	Oklahoma
16.	Jordan Parker	Pittsburg (Pittsburg, CA)	DB	6-1	170	Oklahoma
17.	Chris Daniels	Trinity (Euless, TX)	DL	6-4	328	Texas
18.	Austin Kendall	Cuthbertson (Waxhaw, NC)	QB	6-2	210	Oklahoma
19.	Shane Buechele	Lamar (Arlington, TX)	QB	6-1	190	Texas
20.	Mark Jackson Jr.	Steele (Cibolo, TX)	LB	6-3	235	Oklahoma
21.	Collin Johnson	Valley Christian (San Jose, CA)	WR	6-5	203	Texas
22.	Andrew Fitzgerald	Marcus (Flower Mound, TX)	DE	6-5	255	Texas
23.	Bryce Youngquist	Los Osos (Rancho Cucamonga, CA)	LB	6-1	215	Oklahoma
24.	Isaiah Graham	Bastrop (Bastrop, LA)	WR	6-1	185	TCU
25.	Mykel Jones	Patterson (Patterson, LA)	WR	6-0	180	Oklahoma
26.	J.P. Urquidez	Copperas Cove (Copperas Cove, TX)	OL	6-6	300	Baylor
27.	Ross Blacklock	Elkins (Missouri City, TX)	DL	6-4	326	TCU
28.	Kameron Martin	Memorial (Port Arthur, TX)	RB	5-9	180	Baylor
29.	Kyle Porter	Katy (Katy, TX)	RB	5-10	207	Texas
30.	Steven Smothers	Franklin (Reisterstown, MD)	WR	5-9	154	West Virginia
31.	Eric Coffee	Waco (Waco, TX)	CB	5-11	188	Texas
32.	Denzel Okafor	Lewisville (Lewisville, TX)	OL	6-4	295	Texas
33.	Parrish Cobb	La Vega (Waco, TX)	CB	5-11	178	Baylor
34.	Austin Myers	Manvel (Manvel, TX)	OT	6-5	295	TCU
35.	D'Andre Christmas-Giles	St. Augustine (Slidell, LA)	DT	6-3	290	Texas
36.	T.J. Vasher	Rider (Wichita Falls, TX)	WR	6-5	180	Texas Tech
37.	Erik Swenson	Downers Grove (Downers Grove, IL)	OL	6-5	318	Oklahoma
38.	Bravvion Roy	Spring (Spring, TX)	DT	6-2	315	Baylor
39.	Abdul Adams	Hillside (Landover, MD)	RB	5-11	205	Oklahoma
40.	Sean Foster	Carmel Catholic (Mundelein, IL)	OT	6-8	285	Iowa State

PAC-12

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Mique Juarez	North High School (Torrance, CA)	LB	6-2	230	UCLA
2.	Oluwole Betiku	Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA)	DL	6-3	250	USC
3.	Jack Jones	Long Beach Poly (Long Beach, CA)	DB	5-11	170	USC
4.	Tyler Vaughns	Bishop Amat (Covina, CA)	WR	6-2	180	USC
5.	Kaden Smith	Marcus (Flower Mound, TX)	TE	6-5	250	Stanford
6.	K.J. Costello	Santa Margarita (Coto de Caza, CA)	QB	6-5	220	Stanford
7.	N'Keal Harry	Chandler (Chandler, AZ)	WR	6-4	200	Arizona State
8.	Michael Pittman	Oaks Christian (Woodland Hills, CA)	WR	6-4	210	USC
9.	Curtis Robinson	Mater Dei (Irvine, CA)	LB	6-3	215	Stanford
10.	E.J. Price	Archer (Dacula, GA)	OL	6-6	325	USC
11.	Jamel Cook	Miami Central (Miami, FL)	DB	6-3	185	USC
12.	Byron Murphy	Saguaro (Scottsdale, AZ)	DB	5-11	172	Washington
13.	Theo Howard	Westlake (Westlake Village, CA)	WR	6-0	175	UCLA
14.	Boss Tagaloa	De La Salle (Concord, CA)	DL	6-2	295	UCLA
15.	Breland Brandt	Windward (Los Angeles, CA)	LB	6-5	230	UCLA
16.	Lokeni Toailoa	Carter (Rialto, CA)	LB	6-2	240	UCLA
17.	Trevon Sidney	Bishop Amat (Covina, CA)	WR	5-11	170	USC
18.	Camilo Eifler	Bishop O'Dowd (Berkeley, CA)	LB	6-2	214	Washington
19.	Krys Barnes	Liberty (Bakersfield, CA)	LB	6-2	225	UCLA
20.	Josh Imatorbhebhe	North Gwinnett (Suwanee, GA)	WR	6-2	210	USC
21.	Simi Fehoko	Brighton (Sandy, UT)	WR	6-4	190	Stanford
22.	Damian Alloway	Summit (Fontana, CA)	WR	5-10	170	UCLA
23.	Dillon Mitchell	White Station (Memphis, TN)	WR	6-1	190	Oregon
24.	Darian Owens	Clovis West (Fresno, CA)	WR	6-0	190	UCLA
25.	Clark Yarbrough	Woodberry Forest (Rumson, NJ)	OT	6-6	282	Stanford
26.	Brandon Burton	Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA)	S	6-1	200	UCLA
27.	Tristen Wallace	DeSoto (DeSoto, TX)	QB	6-4	235	Oregon
28.	Khalil Tate	Junipero Serra (Gardena, CA)	QB	6-2	206	Arizona
29.	Michael Eletise	Kaiser (Honolulu, HI)	OL	6-4	295	Arizona
30.	Melquise Stovall	Paraclete (Lancaster, CA)	WR	5-9	185	Cal
31.	Vavae Malepeai	Mililani (Aiea, HI)	RB	5-11	195	USC
32.	Brandon Wellington	Eastside Catholic (Bellevue, WA)	LB	6-0	215	Washington
33.	Sean McGrew	St. John Bosco (Torrance, CA)	RB	5-8	175	Washington
34.	Treyjohn Butler	Etiwanda (Rancho Cucamonga, CA)	CB	5-11	190	Stanford
35.	Chase Lucas	Chandler (Chandler, AZ)	DB	6-0	170	Arizona State
36.	Shurod Thompson	Liberty (Antioch, CA)	S	6-2	202	Oregon State
37.	Frank Martin II	Mater Dei (Santa Ana, CA)	OT	6-4	287	USC
38.	Devery Hamilton	Gilman (Ellicott City, MD)	OT	6-6	290	Stanford
39.	Bryson Young	Buchanan (Clovis, CA)	DE	6-5	220	Oregon
40.	Isaiah Gilchrist	Bellevue (Bellevue, WA)	CB	5-11	180	Washington

AMERICAN

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Ed Oliver	Westfield (Houston, TX)	DT	6-2	290	Houston
2.	Karamo Dioubate	Prep Charter (Philadelphia, PA)	DT	6-4	289	Temple
3.	Courtney Lark	Bellaire (Bellaire, TX)	WR	6-1	175	Houston
4.	Darnell Salomon	Miami Central (Hollywood, FL)	WR	6-3	210	USF
5.	Craig Watts	Farragut (St. Petersburg, FL)	S	6-0	180	USF
6.	Dredrick Snelson	Flanagan (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	WR	6-0	198	UCF
7.	D'Eriq King	Manvel (Manvel, TX)	ATH	5-9	170	Houston
8.	Aaron Dowdell	Creekside (Fairburn, GA)	OL	6-4	310	UCF
9.	Jordan Carmouche	Manvel (Manvel, TX)	LB	6-1	230	SMU
10.	John Tate	Pine Bluff (Pine Bluff, AR)	DE	6-3	258	Memphis

MAC

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Matthew Falcon	Southfield (Southfield, MI)	RB	6-1	215	Western Michigan
2.	Tony Poljan	Lansing Catholic (Lansing, MI)	QB	6-7	235	Central Michigan
3.	Stefan Claiborne	Chippewa Valley (Clinton Township, MI)	S	6-1	168	Western Michigan
4.	Spencer Kanz	Luxemburg-Casco (Luxemburg, WI)	OL	6-6	275	Western Michigan
5.	Armani Posey	MLK (Detroit, MI)	DB	6-1	200	Bowling Green
6.	Matt Little	Evanston (Evanston, IL)	QB	6-4	225	Western Michigan
7.	Tristian Pipp	Greendale (Greendale, WI)	LB	6-1	210	Western Michigan
8.	Eric Rogers	De La Salle (Warren, MI)	LB	6-1	225	Western Michigan
9.	Keevon Harris	Labrae (Leavittsburg, OH)	ATH	6-3	200	Ohio
10.	Dontre Boyd	MLK (Detroit, MI)	CB	5-10	160	Western Michigan

SUNBELT

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Darion Anderson	Houston County (Warner Robins, GA)	WR	6-1	170	Georgia Southern
2.	Michael Jackson	Columbia (Lake City, FL)	WR	5-10	170	Georgia Southern
3.	Jalin Buie	Trinity Christian (Jacksonville, FL)	RB	5-8	175	South Alabama
4.	Kelvin Lucky	Edgewood Academy (Elmore, AL)	DE	6-5	228	Troy
5.	Drew Wilson	Ehrhardt (Bamberg, SC)	OL	6-4	285	Georgia Southern
6.	Monquavion Brinson	Mays (Atlanta, GA)	CB	5-11	167	Georgia Southern
7.	Riley Cole	Oneonta (Oneonta, AL)	LB	6-3	230	South Alabama
8.	Zo Bridges	Opelika (Opelika, AL)	LB	6-2	210	Troy
9.	Dontrell Allen	East St. John (Thibodaux, LA)	CB	6-0	181	UL Lafayette
10.	Lawrence Edwards	Spruce Creek (Port Orange, FL)	OL	6-7	260	Georgia Southern

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SEC

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Greg Little	Allen (Allen, TX)	OL	6-6	326	Ole Miss
2.	Shea Patterson	IMG Academy (Shreveport, LA)	QB	6-2	198	Ole Miss
3.	Jacob Eason	Lake Stevens (Lake Stevens, WA)	QB	6-5	211	Georgia
4.	Derrick Brown	Lanier (Sugar Hill, GA)	DL	6-4	315	Auburn
5.	Ben Davis	Gordo (Gordon, AL)	LB	6-4	240	Alabama
6.	Isaac Nauta	IMG Academy (Buford, GA)	TE	6-4	237	Georgia
7.	Mecole Hardman Jr.	Elbert County (Bowman, GA)	WR	5-11	180	Georgia
8.	Lyndell Wilson	Carver (Montgomery, AL)	LB	6-2	240	Alabama
9.	Jonah Williams	Folsom (Folsom, CA)	OL	6-5	290	Alabama
10.	McTelvin Agim	Hope (Texarkana, TX)	DE	6-3	280	Arkansas
11.	Jeffery Simmons	Noxubee County (Macon, MS)	DL	6-4	275	Mississippi State
12.	Kristian Fulton	Archbishop Rummel (Metairie, LA)	DB	6-0	178	LSU
13.	Rashard Lawrence	Neville (Monroe, LA)	DT	6-3	310	LSU
14.	Benito Jones	Wayne County (Waynesboro, MS)	DT	6-1	305	Ole Miss
15.	Antonneous Clayton	Dooly County (Vienna, GA)	DL	6-3	235	Florida
16.	Marlon Davidson	Greenville (Greenville, AL)	DL	6-3	281	Auburn
17.	Tyrie Cleveland	Westfield (Houston, TX)	WR	6-2	194	Florida
18.	B.J. Emmons	Freedom (Morganton, NC)	RB	6-0	220	Alabama
19.	A.J. Brown	Starkville (Starkville, MS)	WR	6-1	225	Ole Miss
20.	Nate Craig-Myers	Tampa Catholic (Dade City, FL)	WR	6-2	205	Auburn
21.	Chauncey Gardner	Cocoa (Cocoa, FL)	DB	5-11	197	Florida
22.	Saivion Smith	IMG Academy (St. Petersburg, FL)	DB	6-3	191	LSU
23.	Antwuan Jackson	Cedar Grove (Ellenwood, GA)	DL	6-2	308	Auburn
24.	Deontay Anderson	Manvel (Manvel, TX)	DB	6-1	212	Ole Miss
25.	Feleipe Franks	Wakulla (Crawfordville, FL)	QB	6-6	214	Florida
26.	Eric Monroe	North Shore (Houston, TX)	DB	6-0	185	LSU
27.	Justin Madubuike	McKinney North (McKinney, TX)	DL	6-3	245	Texas A&M
28.	Nigel Warrior	Peachtree Ridge (Duluth, GA)	S	6-0	186	Tennessee
29.	Nigel Knott	Germantown (Madison, MS)	DB	5-11	180	Alabama
30.	Michael Divinity	John Ehret (Marrero, LA)	LB	6-3	224	LSU
31.	Terrell Hall	St. John's (Washington, DC)	LB	6-5	245	Alabama
32.	Edwin Alexander	St. Thomas Aquinas (Hammond, LA)	DT	6-2	333	LSU
33.	Julian Rochester	McEachern (Powder Springs, GA)	DL	6-5	327	Georgia
34.	Shyheim Carter	Kentwood (Kentwood, LA)	CB	6-0	190	Alabama
35.	Kyle Davis	Archer (Loganville, GA)	WR	6-2	208	Auburn
36.	Jarrett Guarantano	Bergen Catholic (Lodi, NJ)	QB	6-4	205	Tennessee
37.	Landon Young	Lafayette (Lexington, KY)	OL	6-7	305	Kentucky
38.	Raekwon Davis	Meridian (Meridian, MS)	DL	6-7	325	Alabama
39.	Tyler Byrd	Naples (Naples, FL)	DB	6-0	195	Tennessee
40.	Ben Cleveland	Stephens County (Toccoa, GA)	OL	6-6	345	Georgia

C-USA

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Jaquan Yulee	Indian River (Chesapeake, VA)	LB	6-1	246	Marshall
2.	Xavier Gaines	Lake Wales (Frostproof, FL)	QB	6-2	200	Marshall
3.	Pro Wells	Hollins (Kenneth City, FL)	TE	6-5	210	Marshall
4.	Jaquelle Green	D'Iberville (Biloxi, MS)	S	6-0	205	UTSA
5.	JaCorey Morris	Clarke County (Grove Hil, AL)	LB	6-3	220	Southern Miss
6.	JaQua Daniels	Clarke Central (Athens, GA)	RB	6-1	220	Marshall
7.	Sir Patrick Scott	Riverdale Baptist (Upper Marlboro, MD)	CB	6-1	175	Marshall
8.	Jon Randall Belton	West Monroe (West Monroe, LA)	QB	6-3	200	Louisiana Tech
9.	Steven Frank	Oswego (Oswego, IL)	QB	6-4	219	FAU
10.	Keon Howard	Laurel (Laurel, MS)	QB	6-2	205	Southern Miss

MOUNTAIN WEST

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt	School
1.	Cameron Alexander	Mira Costa (Los Angeles, CA)	DE	6-5	225	San Jose State
2.	Armani Rogers	Hamilton (Los Angeles, CA)	QB	6-6	200	UNLV
3.	Alexander Mattison	San Bernardino (San Bernardino, CA)	RB	5-11	200	Boise State
4.	Trevion Armstrong	Trinity (Chesterfield, VA)	WR	6-4	215	Nevada
5.	Kayode Rufai	Lincoln (Portland, OR)	DE	6-5	240	Boise State
6.	Teton Saltes	Valley (Albuquerque, NM)	DE	6-6	240	New Mexico
7.	Christian Colon	Independence (Charlotte, NC)	DT	6-3	325	Colorado State
8.	Donte Coleman	West Mesquite (Mesquite, TX)	TE	6-4	219	Fresno State
9.	Freddie Holly	Norte Vista (Riverside, CA)	RB	5-11	203	Hawaii
10.	Anthony Smith	Desert Pines (Las Vegas, NV)	DE	6-3	250	Colorado State

BY SCHOOL RECRUITING REPORT

RANKINGS PROVIDED BY 247COMPOSITE

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TOP 50 CLASSES

1. ALABAMA
2. FLORIDA STATE
3. LSU
4. OHIO STATE
5. MICHIGAN
6. OLE MISS
7. GEORGIA
8. USC
9. AUBURN
10. CLEMSON
11. TEXAS
12. UCLA
13. FLORIDA
14. TENNESSEE
15. NOTRE DAME
16. STANFORD
17. BAYLOR
18. TEXAS A&M
19. PENN STATE
20. OKLAHOMA
21. MIAMI
22. MICHIGAN STATE
23. TCU
24. SOUTH CAROLINA
25. NEBRASKA
26. ARKANSAS
27. ARIZONA STATE
28. OREGON
29. WASHINGTON
30. PITTSBURGH
31. MISSISSIPPI STATE
32. WISCONSIN
33. DUKE
34. KENTUCKY
35. NORTH CAROLINA
36. UTAH
37. LOUISVILLE
38. WEST VIRGINIA
39. CAL
40. HOUSTON
41. VIRGINIA TECH
42. MARYLAND
43. ARIZONA
44. OKLAHOMA STATE
45. TEXAS TECH
46. IOWA
47. OREGON STATE
48. MINNESOTA
49. NC STATE
50. BYU

BEN DAVIS - ALABAMA

LEVONTA TAYLOR - FSU

TEAM RANKINGS

ACC
1. Florida State
2. Clemson
3. Miami
4. Pittsburgh
5. Duke
6. North Carolina
7. Louisville
8. Virginia Tech
9. NC State
10. Wake Forest
11. Georgia Tech
12. Virginia
13. Syracuse
14. Boston College

BIG 12
1. Texas
2. Baylor
3. Oklahoma
4. TCU
5. West Virginia
6. Oklahoma State
7. Texas Tech
8. Iowa State
9. Kansas State
10. Kansas

BIG TEN
1. Ohio State
2. Michigan
3. Penn State
4. Michigan State
5. Nebraska
6. Wisconsin
7. Maryland
8. Iowa
9. Minnesota
10. Northwestern
11. Indiana
12. Illinois
13. Rutgers
14. Purdue

PAC-12
1. USC
2. UCLA
3. Stanford
4. Arizona State
5. Oregon
6. Washington
7. Utah
8. Cal
9. Arizona
10. Oregon State
11. Washington State
12. Colorado

SEC
1. Alabama
2. LSU
3. Ole Miss
4. Georgia
5. Auburn
6. Florida
7. Tennessee
8. Texas A&M
9. South Carolina
10. Arkansas
11. Mississippi State
12. Kentucky
13. Missouri
14. Vanderbilt

AMERICAN
1. Houston
2. Temple
3. South Florida
4. UCF
5. Memphis
6. SMU
7. Cincinnati
8. East Carolina
9. Tulane
10. Navy
11. Tulsa
12. Connecticut

C-USA
1. Marshall
2. UAB
3. Louisiana Tech
4. Middle Tennessee
5. Southern Miss
6. Florida Atlantic
7. WKU
8. Old Dominion
9. FIU
10. Charlotte
11. UTSA
12. North Texas
13. UTEP

MAC
1. Western Michigan
2. Miami-Ohio
3. Toledo
4. Ball State
5. Ohio
6. Bowling Green
7. Central Michigan
8. Eastern Michigan
9. Northern Illinois
10. Buffalo
11. Akron
12. Kent State

MOUNTAIN WEST
1. Boise State
2. Colorado State
3. San Diego State
4. UNLV
5. Fresno State
6. San Jose State
7. Utah State
8. New Mexico
9. Hawaii
10. Nevada
11. Air Force
12. Wyoming

SUN BELT
1. Georgia Southern
2. Troy
3. Arkansas
4. South Alabama
5. Louisiana-Lafayette
6. Texas State
7. Louisiana-Monroe
8. Appalachian State
9. Georgia State
10. Idaho
11. New Mexico State

MCTELVIN AGIM - ARKANSAS

AP

TOP 100 RISING SENIOR CLASS OF 2017

presented by Wrangler
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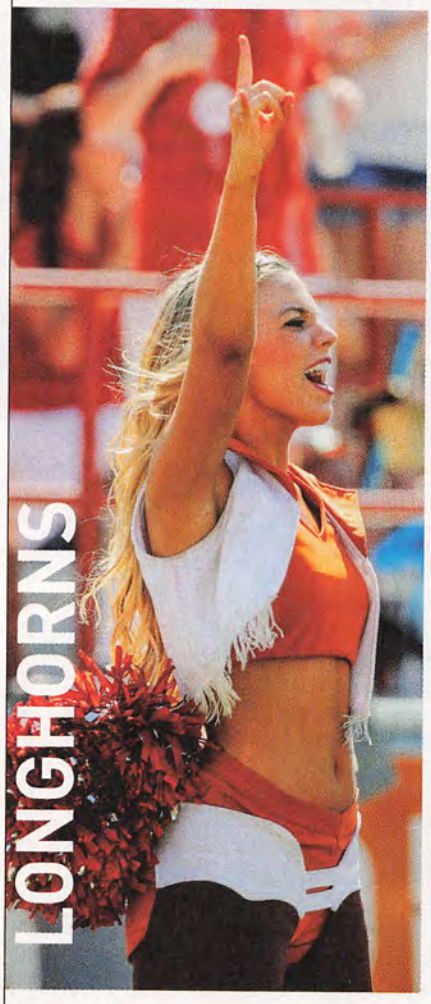
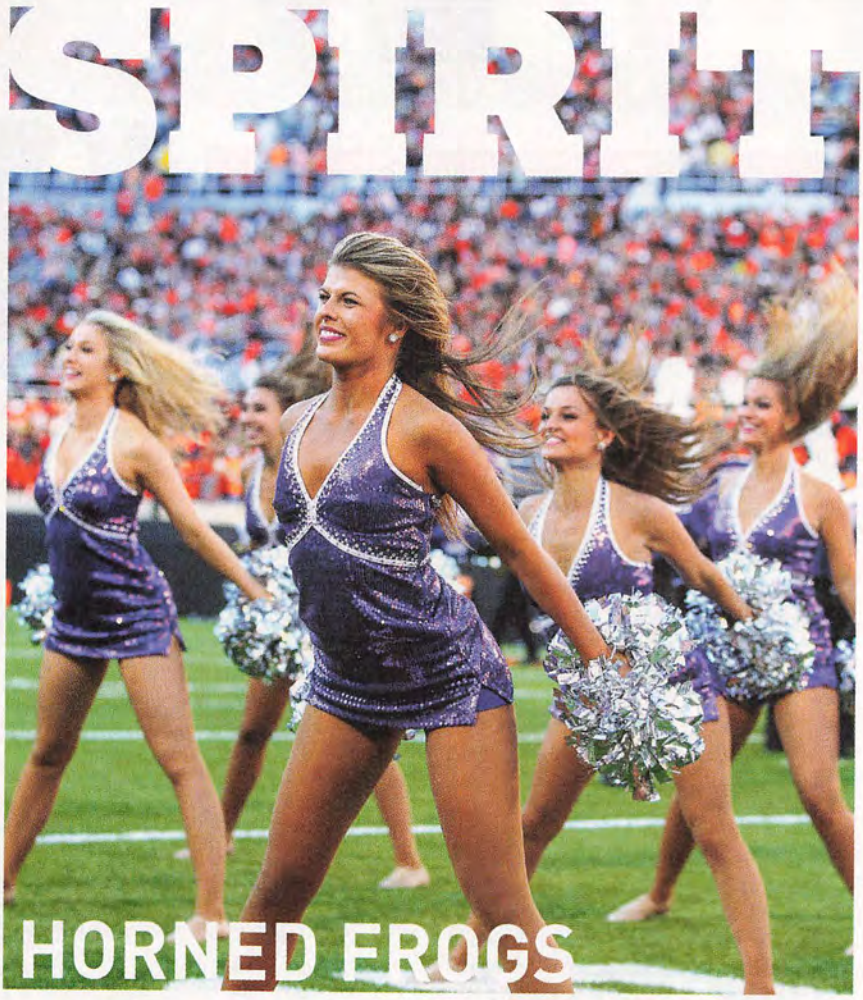
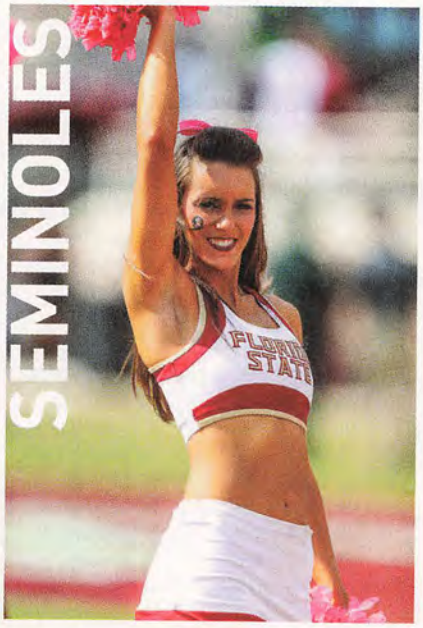
	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt
1.	Najee Harris	Antioch (Antioch, CA)	RB	6-2	220
2.	Dylan Moses	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	LB	6-2	220
3.	Josh Myers	Miamisburg (Miamisburg, OH)	OL	6-6	290
4.	Calvin Ashley	First Academy (Orlando, FL)	OL	6-6	305
5.	Marvin Wilson	Episcopal (Bellaire, TX)	DT	6-4	316
6.	Donovan Peoples-Jones	Cass Tech (Detroit, MI)	WR	6-2	192
7.	Darnay Holmes	Calabasas (Calabasas, CA)	CB	5-10	190
8.	Jeffrey Okudah	South Grand Prairie (Grand Prairie, TX)	S	6-1	194
9.	Foster Sarell	Graham Kapowsin (Graham, WA)	OL	6-6	320
10.	Trevon Grimes	St. Thomas Aquinas (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	WR	6-4	195
11.	Deangelo Gibbs	Grayson (Loganville, GA)	CB	6-2	204
12.	Shaun Wade	Trinity Christian (Jacksonville, FL)	CB	6-1	177
13.	A.J. Epenesa	Edwardsville (Edwardsville, IL)	DE	6-5	230
14.	Austin Jackson	North Canyon (Phoenix, AZ)	OL	6-5	260
15.	Tyler Shelvin	Northside (Lafayette, LA)	DT	6-2	329
16.	Tee Higgins	Oak Ridge (Oak Ridge, TN)	WR	6-5	190
17.	Dylan McCaffrey	Valor Christian (Littleton, CO)	QB	6-5	200
18.	JaCoby Stevens	Oakland (Mufreesboro, TN)	ATH	6-2	200
19.	Isaiah Wilson	Poly Prep (Brooklyn, NY)	OT	6-7	322
20.	Joseph Lewis	Hawkins (Los Angeles, CA)	WR	6-1	207
21.	Joshua Kaindoh	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	DE	6-6	256
22.	Tedarrell Slaton	American Heritage (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	OL	6-4	353
23.	Baron Browning	Kennedale (Kennedale, TX)	LB	6-4	230
24.	Tyjon Lindsey	Centennial (Corona, CA)	WR	5-9	180
25.	Wyatt Davis	St. John Bosco (Bellflower, CA)	OL	6-5	310
26.	Hunter Johnson	Brownsburg (Brownsburg, IN)	QB	6-3	200
27.	Richard LeCounte III	Liberty County (Riceboro, GA)	S	5-10	174
28.	Tate Martell	Bishop Gorman (Las Vegas, NV)	QB	5-10	203
29.	Jeff Thomas	East St. Louis (East St. Louis, IL)	WR	5-10	170
30.	Jarez Parks	Sebastian River (Sebastian, FL)	DE	6-5	255
31.	D'Andre Swift	St. Joseph's (Philadelphia, PA)	RB	5-9	204
32.	Stanford Samuels	Flanagan (Hollywood, FL)	CB	6-2	175
33.	Jerry Jeudy	Deerfield Beach (Pompano Beach, FL)	WR	6-1	174
34.	Stephen Carr	Summit (Fontana, CA)	RB	6-0	202
35.	Jedrick Wills	Lafayette (Lexington, KY)	OL	6-5	315
36.	Cam Akers	Clinton (Clinton, MS)	RB	5-11	210
37.	Lamont Wade	Clairton (Clairton, PA)	CB	5-9	185
38.	James Robinson	Lakeland (Lakeland, FL)	WR	6-3	196
39.	Thomas Graham	Rancho Cucamonga (Rancho Cucamonga, CA)	CB	5-11	170
40.	Jack Anderson	Frisco (Frisco, TX)	OL	6-4	285
41.	Devon Hunter	Indian River (Chesapeake, VA)	ATH	6-3	210
42.	Robert Beal	Norcross (Norcross, GA)	DE	6-4	230
43.	Nate McBride	Vidalia (Vidalia, GA)	LB	6-2	220
44.	Khalan Laborn	Ocean Lakes (Virginia Beach, VA)	RB	5-9	193
45.	Brock Wright	Cy-Fair (Cypress, TX)	TE	6-4	243
46.	Isaiah Pryor	IMG Academy (Bradenton, FL)	S	6-1	195
47.	D.J. Matthews	Trinity Christian (Jacksonville, FL)	WR	5-10	150
48.	Maleik Gray	LaVergne (LaVergne, TN)	ATH	6-1	195
49.	Jamyest Williams	Archer (Lawrenceville, GA)	CB	5-9	170
50.	Alex Leatherwood	Washington (Pensacola, FL)	OL	6-5	297
51.	D.D. Bowie	Morton (Morton, MS)	WR	6-1	170
52.	Nico Collins	Clay-Chalkville (Pinson, AL)	WR	6-5	195
53.	Anthony McFarland Jr.	DeMatha (Hyattsville, MD)	RB	5-9	189
54.	Chase Young	DeMatha (Hyattsville, MD)	DE	6-5	220
55.	Cyrus Fagan	Mainland (Daytona Beach, FL)	S	6-2	182

	Player	High School (Hometown)	Pos	Ht	Wt
56.	Todd Harris	Plaquemine (Plaquemine, LA)	S	6-0	180
57.	Trey Smith	University School (Jackson, TN)	OL	6-5	302
58.	Greg Johnson	Hawkins (Los Angeles, CA)	ATH	5-10	185
59.	Ryan Kelley	Basha (Chandler, AZ)	QB	6-2	170
60.	Austin Deculus	Cy-Fair (Cypress, TX)	OL	6-6	315
61.	Jake Moretti	Pomona (Arvada, CO)	OL	6-5	285
62.	Anthony Hines	Plano East (Plano, TX)	LB	6-3	230
63.	J.K. Dobbins	La Grange (La Grange, TX)	RB	5-10	200
64.	Jake Fromm	Houston County (Warner Robins, GA)	QB	6-3	220
65.	Jay Tufele	Bingham (South Jordan, UT)	DT	6-3	284
66.	Lagaryonn Carson	Liberty-Eylau (Texarkana, TX)	DE	6-4	260
67.	Micah Clark	St. John Vianney (Holmdel, NJ)	OL	6-5	283
68.	Tua Tagovailoa	St. Louis (Honolulu, HI)	QB	6-1	190
69.	Drew Singleton	Paramus Catholic (Paramus, NJ)	LB	6-2	215
70.	Shawn Robinson	Guyer (Denton, TX)	QB	6-3	207
71.	Chuck Filiaga	Vista Murrieta (Murrieta, CA)	OL	6-5	330
72.	Deommodore Lenior	Bishop Mora Salesian (Los Angeles, CA)	Cb	5-10	182
73.	Justin Foster	Crest (Shelby, NC)	LB	6-3	245
74.	Tyrese Robinson	McKinney Boyd (McKinney, TX)	OL	6-5	305
75.	Deon Jones	Archbishop Carroll (Washington, DC)	CB	6-1	180
76.	Haskell Garrett	Bishop Gorman (Las Vegas, NV)	DT	6-2	298
77.	Andrew Thomas	Pace Academy (Atlanta, GA)	OL	6-5	295
78.	Devonta Smith	Amite (Amite, LA)	WR	6-0	165
79.	Ty Chandler	Montgomery Bell (Nashville, TN)	RB	5-11	190
80.	Sam Ehlinger	Westlake (Austin, TX)	QB	6-1	207
81.	Markail Benton	Central (Phenix City, AL)	LB	6-2	227
82.	Chevin Calloway	Bishop Dunne (Dallas, TX)	CB	5-10	180
83.	Davis Mills	Atlanta Christian (Norcross, GA)	QB	6-3	192
84.	Levi Draper	Collinsville (Collinsville, OK)	LB	6-2	230
85.	Cordarrian Richardson	Trezevant (Memphis, TN)	RB	5-11	220
86.	Austin Troxell	Madison Academy (Madison, AL)	OL	6-7	275
87.	William Poole III	Hapeville Charter (Atlanta, GA)	CB	6-0	182
88.	Colin Wilson	Clay (Green Cove Springs, FL)	RB	6-1	220
89.	Derrick Tucker	Manvel (Manvel, TX)	S	6-2	210
90.	Osiris St. Brown	Mater Dei (Anaheim, CA)	WR	6-1	178
91.	Bruce Jordan-Swilling	Brother Martin (New Orleans, LA)	LB	6-0	215
92.	Toneil Carter	Langham Creek (Houston, TX)	RB	5-11	205
93.	Tarik Black	Cheshire Academy (Cheshire, CT)	WR	6-3	185
94.	VanDarius Cowan	Palm Beach Gardens (Palm Beach Gardens, FL)	LB	6-3	225
95.	Paris Ford	Steel Valley (Pittsburgh, PA)	S	6-1	180
96.	Colby Parkinson	Oaks Christian (Thousand Oaks, CA)	TE	6-6	225
97.	Jake Bentley	Opelika (Opelika, AL)	QB	6-4	215
98.	Tony Gray	Central Gwinnett (Lawrenceville, GA)	OL	6-5	290
99.	Daniel Wright	Cardinal Gibbons (Ft. Lauderdale, FL)	S	6-2	175
100.	Chaz Ah You	Westlake (Saratoga Springs, UT)	S	6-1	172

SIDELINE SPIRIT







Athlon Sports

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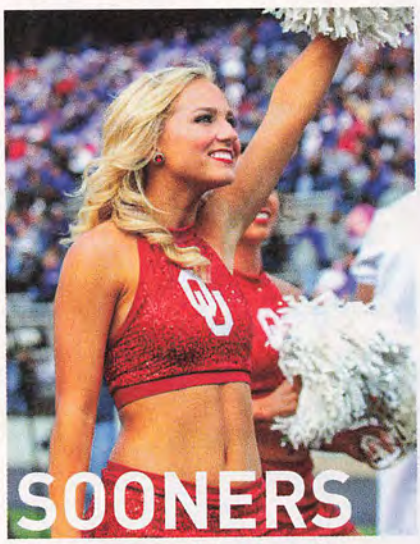
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WILDCATS

HURRICANES

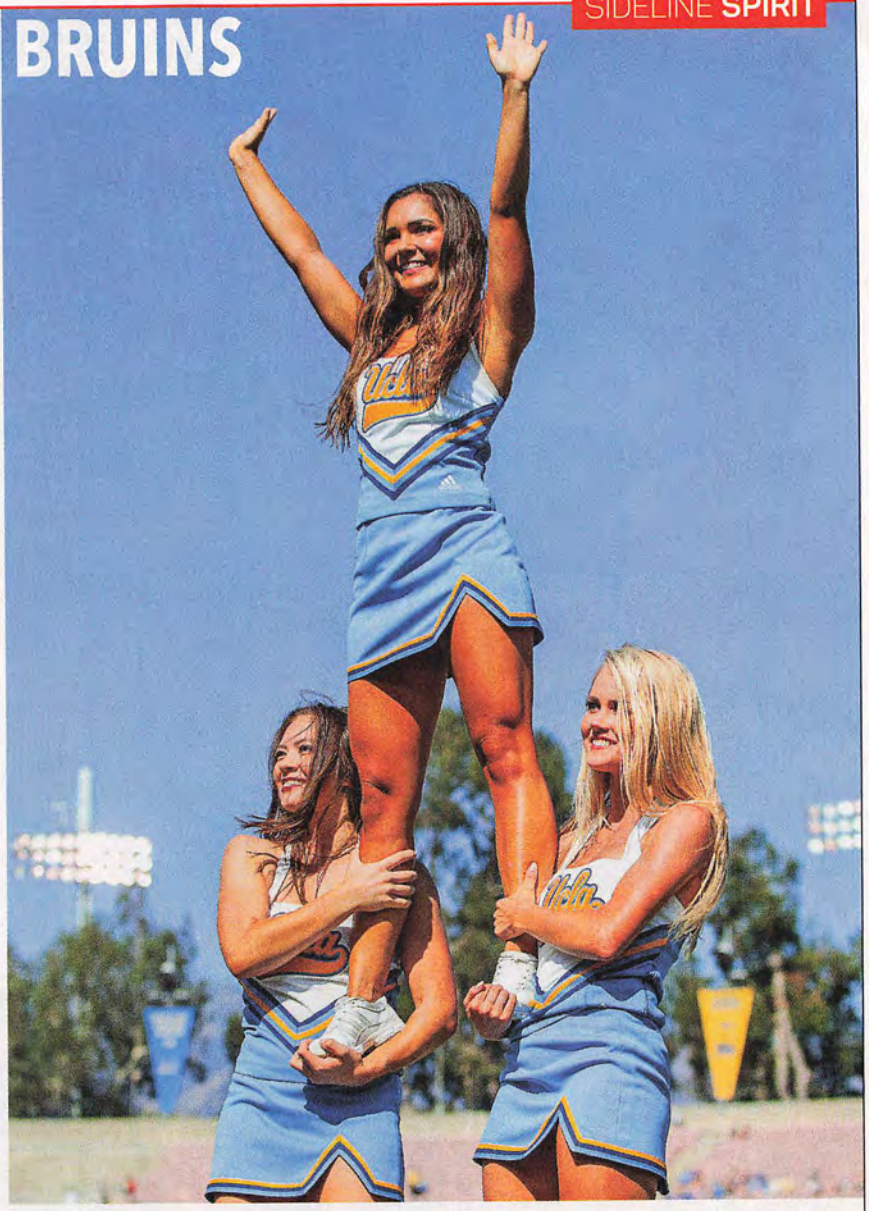
TIGERS

TAR HEELS

WILDCATS

Athlon Sports

COMMODORES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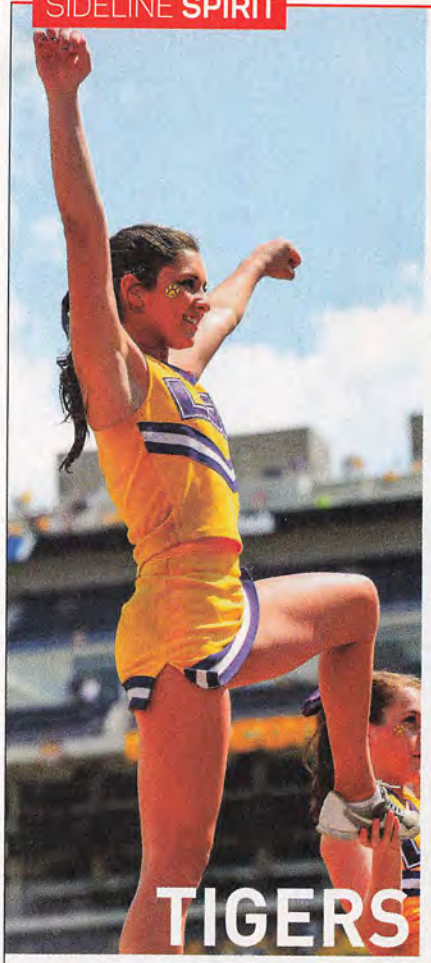
BUCKEYES

COUGARS

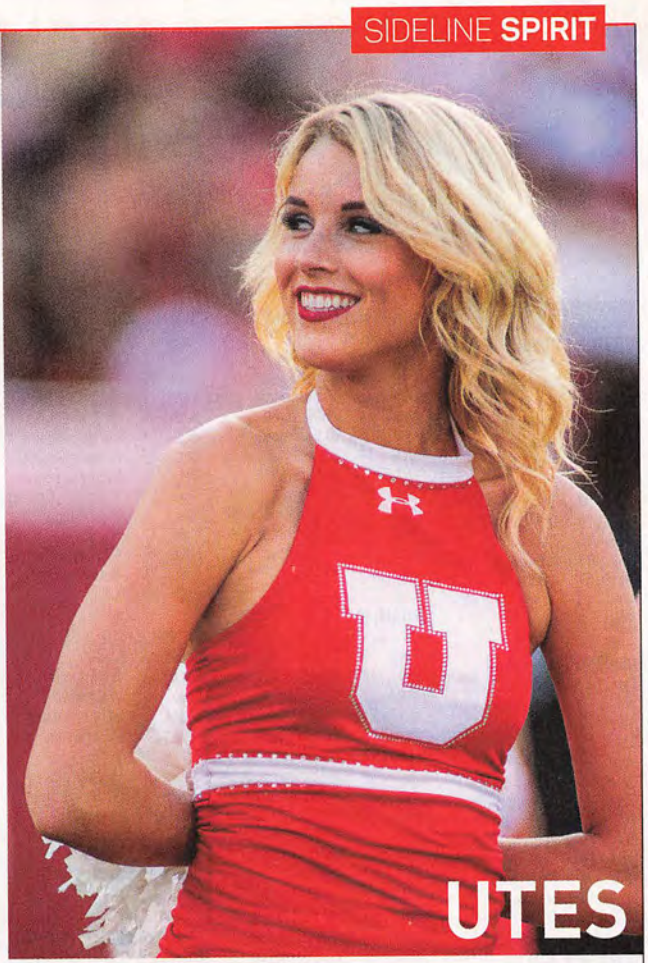

TIGERS

CARDINAL

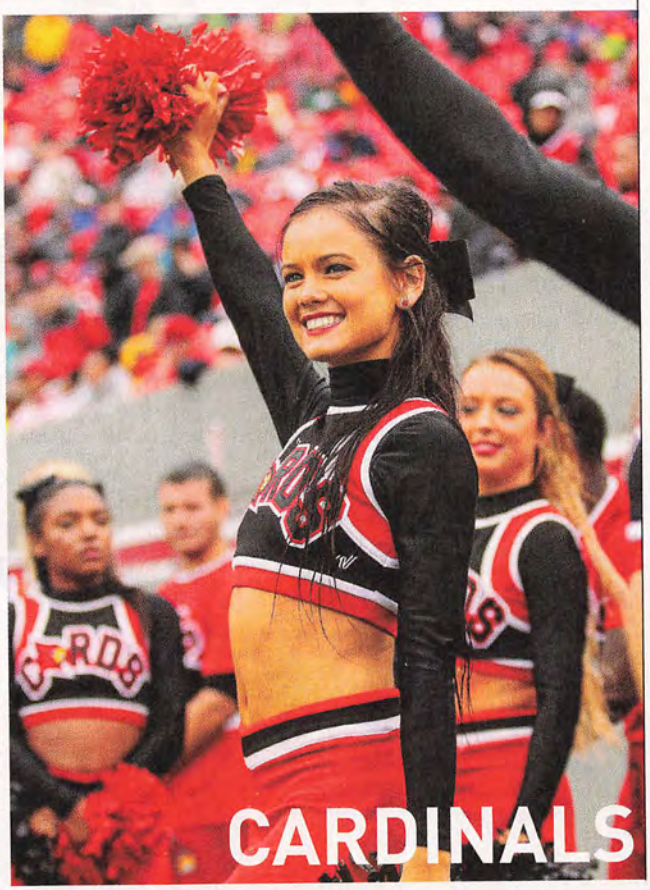
CRIMSON TIDE

Athlon Sports

REBELS


UTES

WILDCATS


CARDINALS

2016 FBS COLLEGE FOOTBALL SCHEDULES

ACC

BOSTON COLLEGE (3-9, 0-8)
Chestnut Hill, MA

Sept.	3	vs. Georgia Tech #
Sept.	10	at Massachusetts
Sept.	17	at Virginia Tech
Sept.	24	Wagner
Oct.	1	Buffalo
Oct.	7	Clemson
Oct.	22	Syracuse
Oct.	29	at NC State
Nov.	5	Louisville
Nov.	11	at Florida State
Nov.	19	Connecticut
Nov.	26	at Wake Forest

#Dublin, Ireland

CLEMSON (14-1, 8-0)
Clemson, SC

Sept.	3	at Auburn
Sept.	10	Troy
Sept.	17	South Carolina St.
Sept.	22	at Georgia Tech
Oct.	1	Louisville
Oct.	7	at Boston College
Oct.	15	NC State
Oct.	29	at Florida State
Nov.	5	Syracuse
Nov.	12	Pittsburgh
Nov.	19	at Wake Forest
Nov.	26	South Carolina

DUKE (8-5, 4-4)
Durham, NC

Sept.	3	NC Central
Sept.	10	Wake Forest
Sept.	17	at Northwestern
Sept.	24	at Notre Dame
Oct.	1	Virginia
Oct.	8	Army
Oct.	14	at Louisville
Oct.	29	at Georgia Tech
Nov.	5	Virginia Tech
Nov.	10	North Carolina
Nov.	19	at Pittsburgh
Nov.	26	at Miami

FLORIDA STATE (10-3, 6-2)
Tallahassee, FL

Sept.	5	vs. Ole Miss #
Sept.	10	Charleston Southern
Sept.	17	at Louisville
Sept.	24	at South Florida
Oct.	1	North Carolina
Oct.	8	at Miami
Oct.	15	Wake Forest
Oct.	29	Clemson
Nov.	5	at NC State
Nov.	11	Boston College
Nov.	19	at Syracuse
Nov.	26	Florida

#Orlando, FL

GEORGIA TECH (3-9, 1-7)
Atlanta, GA

Sept.	3	vs. Boston College #
Sept.	10	Mercer
Sept.	17	Vanderbilt
Sept.	22	Clemson
Oct.	1	Miami
Oct.	8	at Pittsburgh
Oct.	15	Georgia Southern
Oct.	29	Duke
Nov.	5	at North Carolina
Nov.	12	at Virginia Tech
Nov.	19	Virginia
Nov.	26	at Georgia

#Dublin, Ireland

LOUISVILLE (8-5, 5-3)
Louisville, KY

Sept.	1	Charlotte
Sept.	9	at Syracuse
Sept.	17	Florida State
Sept.	24	at Marshall
Oct.	1	at Clemson
Oct.	14	Duke
Oct.	22	NC State
Oct.	29	at Virginia
Nov.	5	at Boston College
Nov.	12	Wake Forest
Nov.	17	at Houston
Nov.	26	Kentucky

MIAMI (8-5, 5-3)
Coral Gables, FL

Sept.	3	Florida A&M
Sept.	10	Florida Atlantic
Sept.	17	at Appalachian State
Oct.	1	at Georgia Tech
Oct.	8	Florida State
Oct.	15	North Carolina
Oct.	20	at Virginia Tech
Oct.	29	at Notre Dame
Nov.	5	Pittsburgh
Nov.	12	at Virginia
Nov.	19	at NC State
Nov.	26	Duke

NORTH CAROLINA (11-3, 8-0)
Chapel Hill, NC

Sept.	3	vs. Georgia #
Sept.	10	at Illinois
Sept.	17	James Madison
Sept.	24	Pittsburgh
Oct.	1	at Florida State
Oct.	8	Virginia Tech
Oct.	15	at Miami
Oct.	22	at Virginia
Nov.	5	Georgia Tech
Nov.	10	at Duke
Nov.	19	The Citadel
Nov.	25	NC State

#Atlanta, GA

NC STATE (7-6, 3-5)
Raleigh, NC

Sept.	1	William & Mary
Sept.	10	at East Carolina
Sept.	17	Old Dominion
Oct.	1	Wake Forest
Oct.	8	Notre Dame
Oct.	15	at Clemson
Oct.	22	at Louisville
Oct.	29	Boston College
Nov.	5	Florida State
Nov.	12	at Syracuse
Nov.	19	Miami
Nov.	25	at North Carolina

PITTSBURGH (8-5, 6-2)
Pittsburgh, PA

Sept.	3	Villanova
Sept.	10	Penn State
Sept.	17	at Oklahoma State
Sept.	24	at North Carolina
Oct.	1	Marshall
Oct.	8	Georgia Tech
Oct.	15	at Virginia
Oct.	27	Virginia Tech
Nov.	5	at Miami
Nov.	12	at Clemson
Nov.	19	Duke
Nov.	26	Syracuse

SYRACUSE (4-8, 2-6)
Syracuse, NY

Sept.	2	Colgate
Sept.	9	Louisville
Sept.	17	South Florida
Sept.	24	at Connecticut
Oct.	1	vs. Notre Dame #
Oct.	8	at Wake Forest
Oct.	15	Virginia Tech
Oct.	22	at Boston College
Nov.	5	at Clemson
Nov.	12	NC State
Nov.	19	Florida State
Nov.	26	at Pittsburgh

#E. Rutherford, NJ

VIRGINIA (4-8, 3-5)
Charlottesville, VA

Sept.	3	Richmond
Sept.	10	at Oregon
Sept.	17	at Connecticut
Sept.	24	Central Michigan
Oct.	1	at Duke
Oct.	15	Pittsburgh
Oct.	22	North Carolina
Oct.	29	Louisville
Nov.	5	at Wake Forest
Nov.	12	Miami
Nov.	19	at Georgia Tech
Nov.	26	at Virginia Tech

VIRGINIA TECH (7-6, 4-4)
Blacksburg, VA

Sept.	3	Liberty
Sept.	10	vs. Tennessee #
Sept.	17	Boston College
Sept.	24	East Carolina
Oct.	8	at North Carolina
Oct.	15	at Syracuse
Oct.	20	Miami
Oct.	27	at Pittsburgh
Nov.	5	at Duke
Nov.	12	Georgia Tech
Nov.	19	at Notre Dame
Nov.	26	Virginia

#Bristol, TN

WAKE FOREST (3-9, 1-7)
Winston-Salem, NC

Sept.	1	Tulane
Sept.	10	at Duke
Sept.	17	Delaware
Sept.	24	at Indiana
Oct.	1	at NC State
Oct.	8	Syracuse
Oct.	15	at Florida State
Oct.	29	Army
Nov.	5	Virginia
Nov.	12	at Louisville
Nov.	19	Clemson
Nov.	26	Boston College

AMERICAN

CINCINNATI (7-6, 4-4)
Cincinnati, OH

Sept.	1	Tennessee-Martin
Sept.	10	at Purdue
Sept.	15	Houston
Sept.	24	Miami (Ohio)
Oct.	1	South Florida
Oct.	8	at Connecticut
Oct.	22	East Carolina
Oct.	29	at Temple
Nov.	5	BYU
Nov.	12	at UCF
Nov.	18	Memphis
Nov.	25	at Tulsa

CONNECTICUT (6-7, 4-4)
Storrs, CT

Sept.	1	Maine
Sept.	10	at Navy
Sept.	17	Virginia
Sept.	24	Syracuse
Sept.	29	at Houston
Oct.	8	Cincinnati
Oct.	15	at South Florida
Oct.	22	UCF
Oct.	29	at East Carolina
Nov.	4	Temple
Nov.	19	at Boston College
Nov.	26	Tulane

EAST CAROLINA (5-7, 3-5)
Greenville, NC

Sept.	3	Western Carolina
Sept.	10	NC State
Sept.	17	at South Carolina
Sept.	24	at Virginia Tech
Oct.	1	UCF
Oct.	8	at South Florida
Oct.	13	Navy
Oct.	22	at Cincinnati
Oct.	29	Connecticut
Nov.	5	at Tulsa
Nov.	12	SMU
Nov.	26	at Temple

HOUSTON (13-1, 7-1)
Houston, TX

Sept.	3	Oklahoma #
Sept.	10	Lamar
Sept.	15	at Cincinnati
Sept.	24	at Texas State
Sept.	29	Connecticut
Oct.	8	at Navy
Oct.	15	Tulsa
Oct.	22	at SMU
Oct.	29	UCF
Nov.	12	Tulane
Nov.	17	Louisville
Nov.	25	at Memphis

#NRG Stadium

MEMPHIS (9-4, 5-3)
Memphis, TN

Sept.	3	SE Missouri State
Sept.	17	Kansas
Sept.	24	Bowling Green
Oct.	1	at Ole Miss
Oct.	6	Temple
Oct.	14	at Tulane
Oct.	22	at Navy
Oct.	29	Tulsa
Nov.	5	at SMU
Nov.	12	South Florida
Nov.	18	at Cincinnati
Nov.	25	Houston

NAVY (11-2, 7-1)
Annapolis, MD

Sept.	3	Fordham
Sept.	10	Connecticut
Sept.	17	at Tulane
Oct.	1	at Air Force
Oct.	8	Houston
Oct.	13	at East Carolina
Oct.	22	Memphis
Oct.	28	at South Florida
Nov.	5	vs. Notre Dame #
Nov.	12	Tulsa
Nov.	26	at SMU
Dec.	10	vs. Army %

#Jacksonville, FL %Baltimore, MD

SOUTH FLORIDA (8-5, 6-2)
Tampa, FL

Sept.	3	Towson
Sept.	10	Northern Illinois
Sept.	17	at Syracuse
Sept.	24	Florida State
Oct.	1	at Cincinnati
Oct.	8	East Carolina
Oct.	15	Connecticut
Oct.	21	at Temple
Oct.	28	Navy
Nov.	12	at Memphis
Nov.	19	at SMU
Nov.	26	UCF

SMU (2-10, 1-7)
Dallas, TX

Sept.	3	at North Texas
Sept.	10	at Baylor
Sept.	17	Liberty
Sept.	24	TCU
Oct.	1	at Temple
Oct.	7	at Tulsa
Oct.	22	Houston
Oct.	29	at Tulane
Nov.	5	Memphis
Nov.	12	at East Carolina
Nov.	19	South Florida
Nov.	26	Navy

TEMPLE (10-4, 7-1)
Philadelphia, PA

Sept.	3	Army
Sept.	10	Stony Brook
Sept.	17	at Penn State
Sept.	24	Charlotte
Oct.	1	SMU
Oct.	6	at Memphis
Oct.	15	at UCF
Oct.	21	South Florida
Oct.	29	Cincinnati
Nov.	4	at Connecticut
Nov.	19	at Tulane
Nov.	26	East Carolina

TULANE (3-9, 1-7)
New Orleans, LA

Sept.	1	at Wake Forest
Sept.	10	Southern
Sept.	17	Navy
Sept.	24	UL Lafayette
Oct.	1	vs. Massachusetts #
Oct.	7	at UCF
Oct.	14	Memphis
Oct.	22	at Tulsa
Oct.	29	SMU
Nov.	12	at Houston
Nov.	19	Temple
Nov.	26	at Connecticut

#Foxboro, MA

TULSA (6-7, 3-5)
Tulsa, OK

Sept.	3	San Jose State
Sept.	10	at Ohio State
Sept.	17	North Carolina A&T
Sept.	24	at Fresno State
Oct.	7	SMU
Oct.	15	at Houston
Oct.	22	Tulane
Oct.	29	at Memphis
Nov.	5	East Carolina
Nov.	12	at Navy
Nov.	19	at UCF
Nov.	25	Cincinnati

UCF (0-12, 0-8)
Orlando, FL

Sept.	3	South Carolina St.
Sept.	10	at Michigan
Sept.	17	Maryland
Sept.	24	at FIU
Oct.	1	at East Carolina
Oct.	7	Tulane
Oct.	15	Temple
Oct.	22	at Connecticut
Oct.	29	at Houston
Nov.	12	Cincinnati
Nov.	19	Tulsa
Nov.	26	at South Florida

BIG TEN

ILLINOIS (5-7, 2-6)
Champaign, IL

Sept.	3	Murray State
Sept.	10	North Carolina
Sept.	17	Western Michigan
Oct.	1	at Nebraska
Oct.	8	Purdue
Oct.	15	at Rutgers
Oct.	22	at Michigan
Oct.	29	Minnesota
Nov.	5	Michigan State
Nov.	12	at Wisconsin
Nov.	19	Iowa
Nov.	26	at Northwestern

INDIANA (6-7, 2-6)
Bloomington, IN

Sept.	1	at FIU
Sept.	10	Ball State
Sept.	24	Wake Forest
Oct.	1	Michigan State
Oct.	8	at Ohio State
Oct.	15	Nebraska
Oct.	22	at Northwestern
Oct.	29	Maryland
Nov.	5	at Rutgers
Nov.	12	Penn State
Nov.	19	at Michigan
Nov.	26	Purdue

IOWA (12-2, 8-0)
Iowa City, IA

Sept.	3	Miami (Ohio)
Sept.	10	Iowa State
Sept.	17	North Dakota St.
Sept.	24	at Rutgers
Oct.	1	Northwestern
Oct.	8	at Minnesota
Oct.	15	at Purdue
Oct.	22	Wisconsin
Nov.	5	at Penn State
Nov.	12	Michigan
Nov.	19	at Illinois
Nov.	25	Nebraska

MARYLAND (3-9, 1-7)
College Park, MD

Sept.	3	Howard
Sept.	10	at FIU
Sept.	17	at UCF
Oct.	1	Purdue
Oct.	8	at Penn State
Oct.	15	Minnesota
Oct.	22	Michigan State
Oct.	29	at Indiana
Nov.	5	at Michigan
Nov.	12	Ohio State
Nov.	19	at Nebraska
Nov.	26	Rutgers

MICHIGAN (10-3, 6-2)
Ann Arbor, MI

Sept.	3	Hawaii
Sept.	10	UCF
Sept.	17	Colorado
Sept.	24	Penn State
Oct.	1	Wisconsin
Oct.	8	at Rutgers
Oct.	22	Illinois
Oct.	29	at Michigan State
Nov.	5	Maryland
Nov.	12	at Iowa
Nov.	19	Indiana
Nov.	26	at Ohio State

MICHIGAN STATE (12-2, 7-1)
East Lansing, MI

Sept.	2	Furman
Sept.	17	at Notre Dame
Sept.	24	Wisconsin
Oct.	1	at Indiana
Oct.	8	BYU
Oct.	15	Northwestern
Oct.	22	at Maryland
Oct.	29	Michigan
Nov.	5	at Illinois
Nov.	12	Rutgers
Nov.	19	Ohio State
Nov.	26	at Penn State

MINNESOTA (6-7, 2-6)
Minneapolis, MN

Sept.	1	Oregon State
Sept.	10	Indiana State
Sept.	24	Colorado State
Oct.	1	at Penn State
Oct.	8	Iowa
Oct.	15	at Maryland
Oct.	22	Rutgers
Oct.	29	at Illinois
Nov.	5	Purdue
Nov.	12	at Nebraska
Nov.	19	Northwestern
Nov.	26	at Wisconsin

NEBRASKA (6-7, 3-5)
Lincoln, NE

Sept.	3	Fresno State
Sept.	10	Wyoming
Sept.	17	Oregon
Sept.	24	at Northwestern
Oct.	1	Illinois
Oct.	15	at Indiana
Oct.	22	Purdue
Oct.	29	at Wisconsin
Nov.	5	at Ohio State
Nov.	12	Minnesota
Nov.	19	Maryland
Nov.	25	at Iowa

NORTHWESTERN (10-3, 6-2)
Evanston, IL

Sept.	3	Western Michigan
Sept.	10	Illinois State
Sept.	17	Duke
Sept.	24	Nebraska
Oct.	1	at Iowa
Oct.	15	at Michigan State
Oct.	22	Indiana
Oct.	29	at Ohio State
Nov.	5	Wisconsin
Nov.	12	at Purdue
Nov.	19	at Minnesota
Nov.	26	Illinois

OHIO STATE (12-1, 7-1)
Columbus, OH

Sept.	3	Bowling Green
Sept.	10	Tulsa
Sept.	17	at Oklahoma
Oct.	1	Rutgers
Oct.	8	Indiana
Oct.	15	at Wisconsin
Oct.	22	at Penn State
Oct.	29	Northwestern
Nov.	5	Nebraska
Nov.	12	at Maryland
Nov.	19	at Michigan State
Nov.	26	Michigan

PENN STATE (7-6, 4-4)
University Park, PA

Sept.	3	Kent State
Sept.	10	at Pittsburgh
Sept.	17	Temple
Sept.	24	at Michigan
Oct.	1	Minnesota
Oct.	8	Maryland
Oct.	22	Ohio State
Oct.	29	at Purdue
Nov.	5	Iowa
Nov.	12	at Indiana
Nov.	19	at Rutgers
Nov.	26	Michigan State

PURDUE (2-10, 1-7)
West Lafayette, IN

Sept.	3	Eastern Kentucky
Sept.	10	Cincinnati
Sept.	24	Nevada
Oct.	1	at Maryland
Oct.	8	at Illinois
Oct.	15	Iowa
Oct.	22	at Nebraska
Oct.	29	Penn State
Nov.	5	at Minnesota
Nov.	12	Northwestern
Nov.	19	Wisconsin
Nov.	26	at Indiana

RUTGERS (4-8, 1-7)
New Brunswick, NJ

Sept.	3	at Washington
Sept.	10	Howard
Sept.	17	New Mexico
Sept.	24	Iowa
Oct.	1	at Ohio State
Oct.	8	Michigan
Oct.	15	Illinois
Oct.	22	at Minnesota
Nov.	5	Indiana
Nov.	12	at Michigan State
Nov.	19	Penn State
Nov.	26	at Maryland

WISCONSIN (10-3, 6-2)
Madison, WI

Sept.	3	vs. LSU #
Sept.	10	Akron
Sept.	17	Georgia State
Sept.	24	at Michigan State
Oct.	1	at Michigan
Oct.	15	Ohio State
Oct.	22	at Iowa
Oct.	29	Nebraska
Nov.	5	at Northwestern
Nov.	12	Illinois
Nov.	19	at Purdue
Nov.	26	Minnesota

#Green Bay, WI

BIG 12

BAYLOR (10-3, 6-3)
Waco, TX

Sept.	3	Northwestern St.
Sept.	10	SMU
Sept.	17	at Rice
Sept.	24	Oklahoma State
Oct.	1	at Iowa State
Oct.	15	Kansas
Oct.	29	at Texas
Nov.	5	TCU
Nov.	12	at Oklahoma
Nov.	19	Kansas State
Nov.	25	vs. Texas Tech #
Dec.	3	at West Virginia

#Arlington, TX

IOWA STATE (3-9, 2-7)
Ames, IA

Sept.	3	Northern Iowa
Sept.	10	at Iowa
Sept.	17	at TCU
Sept.	24	San Jose State
Oct.	1	Baylor
Oct.	8	at Oklahoma State
Oct.	15	at Texas
Oct.	29	Kansas State
Nov.	3	Oklahoma
Nov.	12	at Kansas
Nov.	19	Texas Tech
Nov.	26	West Virginia

KANSAS (0-12, 0-9)
Lawrence, KS

Sept.	3	Rhode Island
Sept.	10	Ohio
Sept.	17	at Memphis
Sept.	29	at Texas Tech
Oct.	8	TCU
Oct.	15	at Baylor
Oct.	22	Oklahoma State
Oct.	29	at Oklahoma
Nov.	5	at West Virginia
Nov.	12	Iowa State
Nov.	19	Texas
Nov.	26	at Kansas State

KANSAS STATE (6-7, 3-6)
Manhattan, KS

Sept.	2	at Stanford
Sept.	17	Florida Atlantic
Sept.	24	Missouri State
Oct.	1	at West Virginia
Oct.	8	Texas Tech
Oct.	15	at Oklahoma
Oct.	22	Texas
Oct.	29	at Iowa State
Nov.	5	Oklahoma State
Nov.	19	at Baylor
Nov.	26	Kansas
Dec.	3	at TCU

OKLAHOMA (11-2, 8-1)
Norman, OK

Sept.	3	at Houston #
Sept.	10	UL Monroe
Sept.	17	Ohio State
Oct.	1	at TCU
Oct.	8	vs. Texas %
Oct.	15	Kansas State
Oct.	22	at Texas Tech
Oct.	29	Kansas
Nov.	3	at Iowa State
Nov.	12	Baylor
Nov.	19	at West Virginia
Dec.	3	Oklahoma State

#NRG Stadium %Dallas, TX

OKLAHOMA STATE (10-3, 7-2)
Stillwater, OK

Sept.	3	SE Louisiana
Sept.	10	Central Michigan
Sept.	17	Pittsburgh
Sept.	24	at Baylor
Oct.	1	Texas
Oct.	8	Iowa State
Oct.	22	at Kansas
Oct.	29	West Virginia
Nov.	5	at Kansas State
Nov.	12	Texas Tech
Nov.	19	at TCU
Dec.	3	at Oklahoma

TEXAS (5-7, 4-5)
Austin, TX

Sept.	4	Notre Dame
Sept.	10	UTEP
Sept.	17	at California
Oct.	1	at Oklahoma State
Oct.	8	vs. Oklahoma #
Oct.	15	Iowa State
Oct.	22	at Kansas State
Oct.	29	Baylor
Nov.	5	at Texas Tech
Nov.	12	West Virginia
Nov.	19	at Kansas
Nov.	25	TCU

#Dallas, TX

TCU (11-2, 7-2)
Fort Worth, TX

Sept.	3	South Dakota St.
Sept.	10	Arkansas
Sept.	17	Iowa State
Sept.	23	at SMU
Oct.	1	Oklahoma
Oct.	8	at Kansas
Oct.	22	at West Virginia
Oct.	29	Texas Tech
Nov.	5	at Baylor
Nov.	19	Oklahoma State
Nov.	25	at Texas
Dec.	3	Kansas State

TEXAS TECH (7-6, 4-5)
Lubbock, TX

Sept.	3	Stephen F. Austin
Sept.	10	at Arizona State
Sept.	17	Louisiana Tech
Sept.	29	Kansas
Oct.	8	at Kansas State
Oct.	15	West Virginia
Oct.	22	Oklahoma
Oct.	29	at TCU
Nov.	5	Texas
Nov.	12	at Oklahoma State
Nov.	19	at Iowa State
Nov.	25	vs. Baylor #

#Arlington, TX

WEST VIRGINIA (8-5, 4-5)
Morgantown, WV

Sept.	3	Missouri
Sept.	10	Youngstown State
Sept.	24	vs. BYU #
Oct.	1	Kansas State
Oct.	15	at Texas Tech
Oct.	22	TCU
Oct.	29	at Oklahoma State
Nov.	5	Kansas
Nov.	12	at Texas
Nov.	19	Oklahoma
Nov.	26	at Iowa State
Dec.	3	Baylor

#Landover, MD

C-USA

CHARLOTTE (2-10, 0-8)
Charlotte, NC

Sept.	1	at Louisville
Sept.	10	Elon
Sept.	17	Eastern Michigan
Sept.	24	at Temple
Oct.	1	Old Dominion
Oct.	8	at Florida Atlantic
Oct.	15	FIU
Oct.	22	at Marshall
Nov.	5	at Southern Miss
Nov.	12	Rice
Nov.	19	Middle Tennessee
Nov.	26	at UTSA

FLORIDA ATLANTIC (3-9, 3-5)
Boca Raton, FL

Sept.	3	Southern Illinois
Sept.	10	at Miami
Sept.	17	at Kansas State
Sept.	24	Ball State
Oct.	1	at FIU
Oct.	8	Charlotte
Oct.	15	at Marshall
Oct.	29	Western Kentucky
Nov.	5	at Rice
Nov.	12	UTEP
Nov.	19	Old Dominion
Nov.	26	at Middle Tennessee

FIU (5-7, 3-5)
Miami, FL

Sept.	1	Indiana
Sept.	10	Maryland
Sept.	17	at Massachusetts
Sept.	24	UCF
Oct.	1	Florida Atlantic
Oct.	8	at UTEP
Oct.	15	at Charlotte
Oct.	22	Louisiana Tech
Oct.	29	Middle Tennessee
Nov.	5	at Western Kentucky
Nov.	19	Marshall
Nov.	26	at Old Dominion

LOUISIANA TECH (9-4, 6-2)
Ruston, LA

Sept.	3	at Arkansas
Sept.	10	South Carolina St.
Sept.	17	at Texas Tech
Sept.	24	at Middle Tennessee
Oct.	1	UTEP
Oct.	8	Western Kentucky
Oct.	15	at Massachusetts
Oct.	22	at FIU
Oct.	29	Rice
Nov.	5	at North Texas
Nov.	12	UTSA
Nov.	26	at Southern Miss

MARSHALL (10-3, 6-2)
Huntington, WV

Sept.	10	Morgan State
Sept.	17	Akron
Sept.	24	Louisville
Oct.	1	at Pittsburgh
Oct.	8	at North Texas
Oct.	15	Florida Atlantic
Oct.	22	Charlotte
Oct.	29	at Southern Miss
Nov.	5	at Old Dominion
Nov.	12	Middle Tennessee
Nov.	19	at FIU
Nov.	26	Western Kentucky

MIDDLE TENNESSEE (7-6, 6-2)
Murfreesboro, TN

Sept.	3	Alabama A&M
Sept.	10	at Vanderbilt
Sept.	17	at Bowling Green
Sept.	24	Louisiana Tech
Oct.	1	at North Texas
Oct.	15	Western Kentucky
Oct.	22	at Missouri
Oct.	29	at FIU
Nov.	5	UTSA
Nov.	12	at Marshall
Nov.	19	at Charlotte
Nov.	26	Florida Atlantic

NORTH TEXAS (1-11, 1-7)
Denton, TX

Sept.	3	SMU
Sept.	10	Bethune-Cookman
Sept.	17	at Florida
Sept.	24	at Rice
Oct.	1	Middle Tennessee
Oct.	8	Marshall
Oct.	22	at Army
Oct.	29	at UTSA
Nov.	5	Louisiana Tech
Nov.	12	at Western Kentucky
Nov.	19	Southern Miss
Nov.	26	at UTEP

OLD DOMINION (5-7, 3-5)
Norfolk, VA

Sept.	3	Hampton
Sept.	10	at Appalachian State
Sept.	17	at NC State
Sept.	24	UTSA
Oct.	1	at Charlotte
Oct.	8	Massachusetts
Oct.	22	at Western Kentucky
Oct.	29	at UTEP
Nov.	5	Marshall
Nov.	12	Southern Miss
Nov.	19	at Florida Atlantic
Nov.	26	FIU

RICE (5-7, 3-5)
Houston, TX

Sept.	3	at Western Kentucky
Sept.	10	at Army
Sept.	17	Baylor
Sept.	24	North Texas
Oct.	1	at Southern Miss
Oct.	15	UTSA
Oct.	22	Prairie View A&M
Oct.	29	at Louisiana Tech
Nov.	5	Florida Atlantic
Nov.	12	at Charlotte
Nov.	19	UTEP
Nov.	26	at Stanford

SOUTHERN MISS (9-5, 7-1)
Hattiesburg, MS

Sept.	3	at Kentucky
Sept.	10	Savannah State
Sept.	17	Troy
Sept.	24	at UTEP
Oct.	1	Rice
Oct.	8	at UTSA
Oct.	15	at LSU
Oct.	29	Marshall
Nov.	5	Charlotte
Nov.	12	at Old Dominion
Nov.	19	at North Texas
Nov.	26	Louisiana Tech

UTEP (5-7, 3-5)
El Paso, TX

Sept.	3	New Mexico State
Sept.	10	at Texas
Sept.	17	Army
Sept.	24	Southern Miss
Oct.	1	at Louisiana Tech
Oct.	8	FIU
Oct.	22	at UTSA
Oct.	29	Old Dominion
Nov.	5	Houston Baptist
Nov.	12	at Florida Atlantic
Nov.	19	at Rice
Nov.	26	North Texas

UTSA (3-9, 3-5)
San Antonio, TX

Sept.	3	Alabama State
Sept.	10	at Colorado State
Sept.	17	Arizona State
Sept.	24	at Old Dominion
Oct.	8	Southern Miss
Oct.	15	at Rice
Oct.	22	UTEP
Oct.	29	North Texas
Nov.	5	at Middle Tennessee
Nov.	12	at Louisiana Tech
Nov.	19	at Texas A&M
Nov.	26	Charlotte

WESTERN KENTUCKY (12-2, 8-0)
Bowling Green, KY

Sept.	3	Rice
Sept.	10	at Alabama
Sept.	17	at Miami (Ohio)
Sept.	24	Vanderbilt
Oct.	1	Houston Baptist
Oct.	8	at Louisiana Tech
Oct.	15	at Middle Tennessee
Oct.	22	Old Dominion
Oct.	29	at Florida Atlantic
Nov.	5	FIU
Nov.	12	North Texas
Nov.	26	at Marshall

MAC

AKRON (8-5, 5-3)
Akron, OH

Sept.	3	VMI
Sept.	10	at Wisconsin
Sept.	17	at Marshall
Sept.	24	Appalachian State
Oct.	1	at Kent State
Oct.	8	Miami (Ohio)
Oct.	15	Western Michigan
Oct.	22	at Ball State
Oct.	27	at Buffalo
Nov.	2	Toledo
Nov.	9	Bowling Green
Nov.	22	at Ohio

BALL STATE (3-9, 2-6)
Muncie, IN

Sept.	2	at Georgia State
Sept.	10	at Indiana
Sept.	17	Eastern Kentucky
Sept.	24	at Florida Atlantic
Oct.	1	Northern Illinois
Oct.	8	at Central Michigan
Oct.	15	at Buffalo
Oct.	22	Akron
Nov.	1	Western Michigan
Nov.	8	Eastern Michigan
Nov.	16	at Toledo
Nov.	22	at Miami (Ohio)

BOWLING GREEN (10-4, 7-1)
Bowling Green, OH

Sept.	3	at Ohio State
Sept.	10	North Dakota
Sept.	17	Middle Tennessee
Sept.	24	at Memphis
Oct.	1	Eastern Michigan
Oct.	8	at Ohio
Oct.	15	at Toledo
Oct.	22	Miami (Ohio)
Nov.	1	at Northern Illinois
Nov.	9	at Akron
Nov.	15	Kent State
Nov.	25	Buffalo

BUFFALO (5-7, 3-5)
Buffalo, NY

Sept.	3	Albany
Sept.	17	at Nevada
Sept.	24	Army
Oct.	1	at Boston College
Oct.	8	Kent State
Oct.	15	Ball State
Oct.	22	at Northern Illinois
Oct.	27	Akron
Nov.	3	at Ohio
Nov.	12	Miami (Ohio)
Nov.	19	at Western Michigan
Nov.	25	at Bowling Green

CENTRAL MICHIGAN (7-6, 6-2)
Mt. Pleasant, MI

Sept.	1	Presbyterian
Sept.	10	at Oklahoma State
Sept.	17	UNLV
Sept.	24	at Virginia
Oct.	1	Western Michigan
Oct.	8	Ball State
Oct.	15	at Northern Illinois
Oct.	22	at Toledo
Oct.	29	Kent State
Nov.	4	at Miami (Ohio)
Nov.	15	Ohio
Nov.	22	at Eastern Michigan

EASTERN MICHIGAN (1-11, 0-8)
Ypsilanti, MI

Sept.	3	Mississippi Valley St.
Sept.	10	at Missouri
Sept.	17	at Charlotte
Sept.	24	Wyoming
Oct.	1	at Bowling Green
Oct.	8	Toledo
Oct.	15	at Ohio
Oct.	22	at Western Michigan
Oct.	29	Miami (Ohio)
Nov.	8	at Ball State
Nov.	16	Northern Illinois
Nov.	22	Central Michigan

KENT STATE (3-9, 2-6)
Kent, OH

Sept.	3	at Penn State
Sept.	10	North Carolina A&T
Sept.	17	Monmouth
Sept.	24	at Alabama
Oct.	1	Akron
Oct.	8	at Buffalo
Oct.	15	at Miami (Ohio)
Oct.	22	Ohio
Oct.	29	at Central Michigan
Nov.	8	Western Michigan
Nov.	15	at Bowling Green
Nov.	25	Northern Illinois

MIAMI (OHIO) (4-8, 3-5)
Oxford, OH

Sept.	3	at Iowa
Sept.	10	Eastern Illinois
Sept.	17	Western Kentucky
Sept.	24	at Cincinnati
Oct.	1	Ohio
Oct.	8	at Akron
Oct.	15	Kent State
Oct.	22	at Bowling Green
Oct.	29	at Eastern Michigan
Nov.	4	Central Michigan
Nov.	12	at Buffalo
Nov.	22	Ball State

NORTHERN ILLINOIS (8-6, 6-2)
Dekalb, IL

Sept.	3	at Wyoming
Sept.	10	at South Florida
Sept.	17	San Diego State
Sept.	24	Western Illinois
Oct.	1	at Ball State
Oct.	8	at Western Michigan
Oct.	15	Central Michigan
Oct.	22	Buffalo
Nov.	1	Bowling Green
Nov.	9	vs. Toledo #
Nov.	16	at Eastern Michigan
Nov.	25	at Kent State

#Chicago, IL

OHIO (8-5, 5-3)
Athens, OH

Sept.	3	Texas State
Sept.	10	at Kansas
Sept.	17	at Tennessee
Sept.	24	Gardner-Webb
Oct.	1	at Miami (Ohio)
Oct.	8	Bowling Green
Oct.	15	Eastern Michigan
Oct.	22	at Kent State
Oct.	27	at Toledo
Nov.	3	Buffalo
Nov.	15	at Central Michigan
Nov.	22	Akron

TOLEDO (10-2, 6-2)
Toledo, OH

Sept.	3	at Arkansas State
Sept.	10	Maine
Sept.	17	Fresno State
Sept.	30	at BYU
Oct.	8	at Eastern Michigan
Oct.	15	Bowling Green
Oct.	22	Central Michigan
Oct.	27	Ohio
Nov.	2	at Akron
Nov.	9	vs. Northern Illinois #
Nov.	16	Ball State
Nov.	25	at Western Michigan

#Chicago, IL

WESTERN MICHIGAN (8-5, 6-2)
Kalamazoo, MI

Sept.	3	at Northwestern
Sept.	10	N. Carolina Central
Sept.	17	at Illinois
Sept.	24	Georgia Southern
Oct.	1	at Central Michigan
Oct.	8	Northern Illinois
Oct.	15	at Akron
Oct.	22	Eastern Michigan
Nov.	1	at Ball State
Nov.	8	at Kent State
Nov.	19	Buffalo
Nov.	25	Toledo

MOUNTAIN WEST

AIR FORCE (8-6, 6-2)
Colorado Springs, CO

Sept.	3	Abilene Christian
Sept.	10	Georgia State
Sept.	24	at Utah State
Oct.	1	Navy
Oct.	8	at Wyoming
Oct.	15	vs. New Mexico #
Oct.	22	Hawaii
Oct.	29	at Fresno State
Nov.	5	at Army
Nov.	12	Colorado State
Nov.	19	at San Jose State
Nov.	26	Boise State

#Dallas, TX

BOISE STATE (9-4, 5-3)
Boise, ID

Sept.	3	at UL Lafayette
Sept.	10	Washington State
Sept.	24	at Oregon State
Oct.	1	Utah State
Oct.	8	at New Mexico
Oct.	15	Colorado State
Oct.	20	BYU
Oct.	29	at Wyoming
Nov.	5	San Jose State
Nov.	12	at Hawaii
Nov.	18	UNLV
Nov.	26	at Air Force

COLORADO STATE (7-6, 5-3)
Fort Collins, CO

Sept.	2	vs. Colorado #
Sept.	10	UTSA
Sept.	17	Northern Colorado
Sept.	24	at Minnesota
Oct.	1	Wyoming
Oct.	8	Utah State
Oct.	15	at Boise State
Oct.	22	at UNLV
Nov.	5	Fresno State
Nov.	12	at Air Force
Nov.	19	New Mexico
Nov.	26	at San Diego State

#Denver, CO

FRESNO STATE (3-8, 2-6)
Fresno, CA

Sept.	3	at Nebraska
Sept.	10	Sacramento State
Sept.	17	at Toledo
Sept.	24	Tulsa
Oct.	1	at UNLV
Oct.	8	at Nevada
Oct.	15	San Diego State
Oct.	22	at Utah State
Oct.	29	Air Force
Nov.	5	at Colorado State
Nov.	19	Hawaii
Nov.	26	San Jose State

HAWAII (3-10, 0-8)
Honolulu, HI

Aug.	27	vs. California #
Sept.	3	at Michigan
Sept.	10	Tennessee-Martin
Sept.	17	at Arizona
Oct.	1	Nevada
Oct.	8	at San Jose State
Oct.	15	UNLV
Oct.	22	at Air Force
Oct.	29	New Mexico
Nov.	5	at San Diego State
Nov.	12	Boise State
Nov.	19	at Fresno State
Nov.	26	Massachusetts

#Sydney, Australia

NEVADA (7-6, 4-4)
Reno, NV

Sept.	3	Cal Poly
Sept.	10	at Notre Dame
Sept.	17	Buffalo
Sept.	24	at Purdue
Oct.	1	at Hawaii
Oct.	8	Fresno State
Oct.	15	at San Jose State
Oct.	22	Wyoming
Nov.	5	at New Mexico
Nov.	12	San Diego State
Nov.	19	Utah State
Nov.	26	at UNLV

NEW MEXICO (7-6, 5-3)
Albuquerque, NM

Sept.	3	South Dakota
Sept.	10	at New Mexico State
Sept.	17	at Rutgers
Oct.	1	San Jose State
Oct.	8	Boise State
Oct.	15	vs. Air Force #
Oct.	22	UL Monroe
Oct.	29	at Hawaii
Nov.	5	Nevada
Nov.	12	at Utah State
Nov.	19	at Colorado State
Nov.	26	Wyoming

#Dallas, TX

SAN DIEGO STATE (11-3, 8-0)
San Diego, CA

Sept.	3	New Hampshire
Sept.	10	California
Sept.	17	at Northern Illinois
Oct.	1	at South Alabama
Oct.	8	UNLV
Oct.	15	at Fresno State
Oct.	22	San Jose State
Oct.	29	at Utah State
Nov.	5	Hawaii
Nov.	12	at Nevada
Nov.	19	at Wyoming
Nov.	26	Colorado State

SAN JOSE STATE (6-7, 4-4)
San Jose, CA

Sept.	3	at Tulsa
Sept.	10	Portland State
Sept.	17	Utah
Sept.	24	at Iowa State
Oct.	1	at New Mexico
Oct.	8	Hawaii
Oct.	15	Nevada
Oct.	22	at San Diego State
Oct.	29	UNLV
Nov.	5	at Boise State
Nov.	19	Air Force
Nov.	26	at Fresno State

UNLV (3-9, 2-6)
Las Vegas, NV

Sept.	1	Jackson State
Sept.	10	at UCLA
Sept.	17	at Central Michigan
Sept.	24	Idaho
Oct.	1	Fresno State
Oct.	8	at San Diego State
Oct.	15	at Hawaii
Oct.	22	Colorado State
Oct.	29	at San Jose State
Nov.	12	Wyoming
Nov.	18	at Boise State
Nov.	26	Nevada

UTAH STATE (6-7, 5-3)
Logan, UT

Sept.	1	Weber State
Sept.	10	at USC
Sept.	17	Arkansas State
Sept.	24	Air Force
Oct.	1	at Boise State
Oct.	8	at Colorado State
Oct.	22	Fresno State
Oct.	29	San Diego State
Nov.	5	at Wyoming
Nov.	12	New Mexico
Nov.	19	at Nevada
Nov.	26	at BYU

WYOMING (2-10, 2-6)
Laramie, WY

Sept.	3	Northern Illinois
Sept.	10	at Nebraska
Sept.	17	UC Davis
Sept.	24	at Eastern Michigan
Oct.	1	at Colorado State
Oct.	8	Air Force
Oct.	22	at Nevada
Oct.	29	Boise State
Nov.	5	Utah State
Nov.	12	at UNLV
Nov.	19	San Diego State
Nov.	26	New Mexico

PAC-12

ARIZONA (7-6, 3-6)
Tucson, AZ

Sept.	3	vs. BYU #
Sept.	10	Grambling State
Sept.	17	Hawaii
Sept.	24	Washington
Oct.	1	at UCLA
Oct.	8	at Utah
Oct.	15	USC
Oct.	29	Stanford
Nov.	5	at Washington State
Nov.	12	Colorado
Nov.	19	at Oregon State
Nov.	25	Arizona State

#Glendale, AZ

ARIZONA STATE (6-7, 4-5)
Tempe, AZ

Sept.	3	Northern Arizona
Sept.	10	Texas Tech
Sept.	17	at UTSA
Sept.	24	California
Oct.	1	at USC
Oct.	8	UCLA
Oct.	15	at Colorado
Oct.	22	Washington State
Oct.	29	at Oregon
Nov.	10	Utah
Nov.	19	at Washington
Nov.	25	at Arizona

CALIFORNIA (8-5, 4-5)
Berkeley, CA

Aug.	27	vs. Hawaii #
Sept.	10	at San Diego State
Sept.	17	Texas
Sept.	24	at Arizona State
Oct.	1	Utah
Oct.	8	at Oregon State
Oct.	21	Oregon
Oct.	27	at USC
Nov.	5	Washington
Nov.	12	at Washington State
Nov.	19	Stanford
Nov.	26	UCLA

#Sydney, Australia

COLORADO (4-9, 2-7)
Boulder, CO

Sept.	2	vs. Colorado State #
Sept.	10	Idaho State
Sept.	17	at Michigan
Sept.	24	at Oregon
Oct.	1	Oregon State
Oct.	8	at USC
Oct.	15	Arizona State
Oct.	22	at Stanford
Nov.	3	UCLA
Nov.	12	at Arizona
Nov.	19	Washington State
Nov.	26	Utah

#Denver, CO

OREGON (9-4, 7-2)
Eugene, OR

Sept.	3	UC Davis
Sept.	10	Virginia
Sept.	17	at Nebraska
Sept.	24	Colorado
Oct.	1	at Washington State
Oct.	8	Washington
Oct.	21	at California
Oct.	29	Arizona State
Nov.	5	at USC
Nov.	12	Stanford
Nov.	19	at Utah
Nov.	26	at Oregon State

OREGON STATE (2-10, 0-9)
Corvallis, OR

Sept.	1	at Minnesota
Sept.	17	Idaho State
Sept.	24	Boise State
Oct.	1	at Colorado
Oct.	8	California
Oct.	15	Utah
Oct.	22	at Washington
Oct.	29	Washington State
Nov.	5	at Stanford
Nov.	12	at UCLA
Nov.	19	Arizona
Nov.	26	Oregon

STANFORD (12-2, 8-1)
Stanford, CA

Sept.	2	Kansas State
Sept.	17	USC
Sept.	24	at UCLA
Sept.	30	at Washington
Oct.	8	Washington State
Oct.	15	at Notre Dame
Oct.	22	Colorado
Oct.	29	at Arizona
Nov.	5	Oregon State
Nov.	12	at Oregon
Nov.	19	at California
Nov.	26	Rice

UCLA (8-5, 5-4)
Los Angeles, CA

Sept.	3	at Texas A&M
Sept.	10	UNLV
Sept.	17	at BYU
Sept.	24	Stanford
Oct.	1	Arizona
Oct.	8	at Arizona State
Oct.	15	at Washington State
Oct.	22	Utah
Nov.	3	at Colorado
Nov.	12	Oregon State
Nov.	19	USC
Nov.	26	at California

USC (8-6, 6-2)
Los Angeles, CA

Sept.	3	vs. Alabama #
Sept.	10	Utah State
Sept.	17	at Stanford
Sept.	23	at Utah
Oct.	1	Arizona State
Oct.	8	Colorado
Oct.	15	at Arizona
Oct.	27	California
Nov.	5	Oregon
Nov.	12	at Washington
Nov.	19	at UCLA
Nov.	26	Notre Dame

#Arlington, TX

UTAH (10-3, 6-3)
Salt Lake City, UT

Sept.	1	Southern Utah
Sept.	10	BYU
Sept.	17	at San Jose State
Sept.	23	USC
Oct.	1	at California
Oct.	8	Arizona
Oct.	15	at Oregon State
Oct.	22	at UCLA
Oct.	29	Washington
Nov.	10	at Arizona State
Nov.	19	Oregon
Nov.	26	at Colorado

WASHINGTON (7-6, 5-4)
Seattle, WA

Sept.	3	Rutgers
Sept.	10	Idaho
Sept.	17	Portland State
Sept.	24	at Arizona
Sept.	30	Stanford
Oct.	8	at Oregon
Oct.	22	Oregon State
Oct.	29	at Utah
Nov.	5	at California
Nov.	12	USC
Nov.	19	Arizona State
Nov.	25	at Washington State

WASHINGTON STATE (9-4, 6-3)
Pullman, WA

Sept.	3	Eastern Washington
Sept.	10	at Boise State
Sept.	17	Idaho
Oct.	1	Oregon
Oct.	8	at Stanford
Oct.	15	UCLA
Oct.	22	at Arizona State
Oct.	29	at Oregon State
Nov.	5	Arizona
Nov.	12	California
Nov.	19	at Colorado
Nov.	25	Washington

SEC

ALABAMA (14-1, 7-1)
Tuscaloosa, AL

Sept.	3	vs. USC #
Sept.	10	Western Kentucky
Sept.	17	at Ole Miss
Sept.	24	Kent State
Oct.	1	Kentucky
Oct.	8	at Arkansas
Oct.	15	at Tennessee
Oct.	22	Texas A&M
Nov.	5	at LSU
Nov.	12	Mississippi State
Nov.	19	Chattanooga
Nov.	26	Auburn

#Arlington, TX

ARKANSAS (8-5, 5-3)
Fayetteville, AR

Sept.	3	Louisiana Tech
Sept.	10	at TCU
Sept.	17	Texas State
Sept.	24	vs. Texas A&M #
Oct.	1	vs. Alcorn State %
Oct.	8	Alabama
Oct.	15	Ole Miss
Oct.	22	at Auburn
Nov.	5	Florida
Nov.	12	LSU
Nov.	19	at Mississippi State
Nov.	26	at Missouri

#Arlington, TX %Little Rock, AR

AUBURN (7-6, 2-6)
Auburn, AL

Sept.	3	Clemson
Sept.	10	Arkansas State
Sept.	17	Texas A&M
Sept.	24	LSU
Oct.	1	UL Monroe
Oct.	8	at Mississippi State
Oct.	22	Arkansas
Oct.	29	at Ole Miss
Nov.	5	Vanderbilt
Nov.	12	at Georgia
Nov.	19	Alabama A&M
Nov.	26	at Alabama

Hurd: Patrick Murphy-Racey; Kizer: Bruce Schwartzman

FLORIDA (10-4, 7-1)
Gainesville, FL

Sept.	3	Massachusetts
Sept.	10	Kentucky
Sept.	17	North Texas
Sept.	24	at Tennessee
Oct.	1	at Vanderbilt
Oct.	8	LSU
Oct.	15	Missouri
Oct.	29	vs. Georgia #
Nov.	5	at Arkansas
Nov.	12	South Carolina
Nov.	19	Presbyterian
Nov.	26	at Florida State

#Jacksonville, FL

GEORGIA (10-3, 5-3)
Athens, GA

Sept.	3	vs. North Carolina #
Sept.	10	Nicholls State
Sept.	17	at Missouri
Sept.	24	at Ole Miss
Oct.	1	Tennessee
Oct.	8	at South Carolina
Oct.	15	Vanderbilt
Oct.	29	vs. Florida %
Nov.	5	at Kentucky
Nov.	12	Auburn
Nov.	19	UL Lafayette
Nov.	26	Georgia Tech

#Atlanta, GA %Jacksonville, FL

KENTUCKY (5-7, 2-6)
Lexington, KY

Sept.	3	Southern Miss
Sept.	10	at Florida
Sept.	17	New Mexico State
Sept.	24	South Carolina
Oct.	1	at Alabama
Oct.	8	Vanderbilt
Oct.	22	Mississippi State
Oct.	29	at Missouri
Nov.	5	Georgia
Nov.	12	at Tennessee
Nov.	19	Austin Peay
Nov.	26	at Louisville

LSU (9-3, 5-3)
Baton Rouge, LA

Sept.	3	vs. Wisconsin #
Sept.	10	Jacksonville State
Sept.	17	Mississippi State
Sept.	24	at Auburn
Oct.	1	Missouri
Oct.	8	at Florida
Oct.	15	Southern Miss
Oct.	22	Ole Miss
Nov.	5	Alabama
Nov.	12	at Arkansas
Nov.	19	South Alabama
Nov.	24	at Texas A&M

#Green Bay, WI

MISSISSIPPI STATE (9-4, 4-4)
Starkville, MS

Sept.	3	South Alabama
Sept.	10	South Carolina
Sept.	17	at LSU
Sept.	24	vs. Massachusetts #
Oct.	8	Auburn
Oct.	15	at BYU
Oct.	22	at Kentucky
Oct.	29	Samford
Nov.	5	Texas A&M
Nov.	12	at Alabama
Nov.	19	Arkansas
Nov.	26	at Ole Miss

#Foxboro, MA

MISSOURI (5-7, 1-7)
Columbia, MO

Sept.	3	at West Virginia
Sept.	10	Eastern Michigan
Sept.	17	Georgia
Sept.	24	Delaware State
Oct.	1	at LSU
Oct.	15	at Florida
Oct.	22	Middle Tennessee
Oct.	29	Kentucky
Nov.	5	at South Carolina
Nov.	12	Vanderbilt
Nov.	19	at Tennessee
Nov.	26	Arkansas

OLE MISS (10-3, 6-2)
Oxford, MS

Sept.	5	vs. Florida State #
Sept.	10	Wofford
Sept.	17	Alabama
Sept.	24	Georgia
Oct.	1	Memphis
Oct.	15	at Arkansas
Oct.	22	at LSU
Oct.	29	Auburn
Nov.	5	Georgia Southern
Nov.	12	at Texas A&M
Nov.	19	at Vanderbilt
Nov.	26	Mississippi State

#Orlando, FL

SOUTH CAROLINA (3-9, 1-7)
Columbia, SC

Sept.	1	at Vanderbilt
Sept.	10	at Mississippi State
Sept.	17	East Carolina
Sept.	24	at Kentucky
Oct.	1	Texas A&M
Oct.	8	Georgia
Oct.	22	Massachusetts
Oct.	29	Tennessee
Nov.	5	Missouri
Nov.	12	at Florida
Nov.	19	Western Carolina
Nov.	26	at Clemson

TENNESSEE (9-4, 5-3)
Knoxville, TN

Sept.	3	Appalachian State
Sept.	10	vs. Virginia Tech #
Sept.	17	Ohio
Sept.	24	Florida
Oct.	1	at Georgia
Oct.	8	at Texas A&M
Oct.	15	Alabama
Oct.	29	at South Carolina
Nov.	5	Tennessee Tech
Nov.	12	Kentucky
Nov.	19	Missouri
Nov.	26	at Vanderbilt

#Bristol, TN

TEXAS A&M (8-5, 4-4)
College Station, TX

Sept.	3	UCLA
Sept.	10	Prairie View
Sept.	17	at Auburn
Sept.	24	vs. Arkansas #
Oct.	1	at South Carolina
Oct.	8	Tennessee
Oct.	22	at Alabama
Oct.	29	New Mexico State
Nov.	5	at Mississippi State
Nov.	12	Ole Miss
Nov.	19	UTSA
Nov.	24	LSU

#Arlington, TX

VANDERBILT (4-8, 2-6)
Nashville, TN

Sept.	1	South Carolina
Sept.	10	Middle Tennessee
Sept.	17	at Georgia Tech
Sept.	24	at Western Kentucky
Oct.	1	Florida
Oct.	8	at Kentucky
Oct.	15	at Georgia
Oct.	22	Tennessee State
Nov.	5	at Auburn
Nov.	12	at Missouri
Nov.	19	Ole Miss
Nov.	26	Tennessee

SUN BELT

APPALACHIAN STATE (10-3, 7-1)
Boone, NC

Sept.	3	at Tennessee
Sept.	10	Old Dominion
Sept.	17	Miami
Sept.	24	at Akron
Oct.	1	Georgia State
Oct.	12	at UL Lafayette
Oct.	22	Idaho
Oct.	27	at Georgia Southern
Nov.	5	Texas State
Nov.	12	at Troy
Nov.	19	UL Monroe
Nov.	26	at New Mexico State

JALEN HURD, TENNESSEE

ARKANSAS STATE (9-4, 8-0)
Jonesboro, AR

Sept.	3	Toledo
Sept.	10	at Auburn
Sept.	17	at Utah State
Sept.	24	Central Arkansas
Oct.	5	Georgia Southern
Oct.	15	South Alabama
Oct.	29	UL Monroe
Nov.	3	at Georgia State
Nov.	12	New Mexico State
Nov.	17	at Troy
Nov.	26	at UL Lafayette
Dec.	3	at Texas State

GEORGIA SOUTHERN (9-4, 6-2)
Statesboro, GA

Sept.	3	Savannah State
Sept.	10	at South Alabama
Sept.	17	UL Monroe
Sept.	24	at Western Michigan
Oct.	5	at Arkansas State
Oct.	15	at Georgia Tech
Oct.	22	at New Mexico State
Oct.	27	Appalachian State
Nov.	5	at Ole Miss
Nov.	12	UL Lafayette
Nov.	19	at Georgia State
Dec.	3	Troy

GEORGIA STATE (6-7, 5-3)
Atlanta, GA

Sept.	2	Ball State
Sept.	10	at Air Force
Sept.	17	at Wisconsin
Oct.	1	at Appalachian State
Oct.	8	Texas State
Oct.	15	at Troy
Oct.	22	Tennessee-Martin
Oct.	29	at South Alabama
Nov.	3	Arkansas State
Nov.	12	UL Monroe
Nov.	19	Georgia Southern
Dec.	3	at Idaho

IDAHO (4-8, 3-5)
Moscow, ID

Sept.	1	Montana State
Sept.	10	at Washington
Sept.	17	at Washington State
Sept.	24	at UNLV
Oct.	1	Troy
Oct.	8	at UL Monroe
Oct.	15	New Mexico State
Oct.	22	at Appalachian State
Nov.	5	at UL Lafayette
Nov.	12	at Texas State
Nov.	26	South Alabama
Dec.	3	Georgia State

UL LAFAYETTE (4-8, 3-5)
Lafayette, LA

Sept.	3	Boise State
Sept.	10	McNeese State
Sept.	17	South Alabama
Sept.	24	at Tulane
Oct.	1	at New Mexico State
Oct.	12	Appalachian State
Oct.	22	at Texas State
Nov.	5	Idaho
Nov.	12	at Georgia Southern
Nov.	19	at Georgia
Nov.	26	Arkansas State
Dec.	3	at UL Monroe

UL MONROE (2-11, 1-7)
Monroe, LA

Sept.	3	Southern
Sept.	10	at Oklahoma
Sept.	17	at Georgia Southern
Oct.	1	at Auburn
Oct.	8	Idaho
Oct.	15	Texas State
Oct.	22	at New Mexico
Oct.	29	at Arkansas State
Nov.	5	South Alabama
Nov.	12	at Georgia State
Nov.	19	at Appalachian State
Dec.	3	UL Lafayette

NEW MEXICO STATE (3-9, 3-5)
Las Cruces, NM

Sept.	3	at UTEP
Sept.	10	New Mexico
Sept.	17	at Kentucky
Sept.	24	at Troy
Oct.	1	UL Lafayette
Oct.	15	at Idaho
Oct.	22	Georgia Southern
Oct.	29	at Texas A&M
Nov.	12	at Arkansas State
Nov.	19	Texas State
Nov.	26	Appalachian State
Dec.	3	at South Alabama

SOUTH ALABAMA (5-7, 3-5)
Mobile, AL

Sept.	3	at Mississippi State
Sept.	10	Georgia Southern
Sept.	17	at UL Lafayette
Sept.	24	Nicholls State
Oct.	1	San Diego State
Oct.	15	at Arkansas State
Oct.	20	Troy
Oct.	29	Georgia State
Nov.	5	at UL Monroe
Nov.	19	at LSU
Nov.	26	at Idaho
Dec.	3	New Mexico State

DESHONE KIZER, NOTRE DAME

TEXAS STATE (3-9, 2-6)
San Marcos, TX

Sept.	3	at Ohio
Sept.	17	at Arkansas
Sept.	24	Houston
Oct.	1	Incarnate Word
Oct.	8	at Georgia State
Oct.	15	at UL Monroe
Oct.	22	UL Lafayette
Nov.	5	at Appalachian State
Nov.	12	Idaho
Nov.	19	at New Mexico State
Nov.	26	Troy
Dec.	3	Arkansas State

TROY (4-8, 3-5)
Troy, AL

Sept.	3	Austin Peay
Sept.	10	at Clemson
Sept.	17	at Southern Miss
Sept.	24	New Mexico State
Oct.	1	at Idaho
Oct.	15	Georgia State
Oct.	20	at South Alabama
Nov.	5	Massachusetts
Nov.	12	Appalachian State
Nov.	17	Arkansas State
Nov.	26	at Texas State
Dec.	3	at Georgia Southern

INDEPENDENTS

ARMY (2-10)
West Point, NY

Sept.	2	at Temple
Sept.	10	Rice
Sept.	17	at UTEP
Sept.	24	at Buffalo
Oct.	8	at Duke
Oct.	15	Lafayette
Oct.	22	North Texas
Oct.	29	at Wake Forest
Nov.	5	Air Force
Nov.	12	vs. Notre Dame #
Nov.	19	Morgan State
Dec.	10	vs. Navy %

#San Antonio, TX %Baltimore, MD

BYU (9-4)
Provo, UT

Sept.	3	vs. Arizona #
Sept.	10	at Utah
Sept.	17	UCLA
Sept.	24	vs. West Virginia %
Sept.	30	Toledo
Oct.	8	at Michigan State
Oct.	14	Mississippi State
Oct.	20	at Boise State
Nov.	5	at Cincinnati
Nov.	12	Southern Utah
Nov.	19	Massachusetts
Nov.	26	Utah State

#Glendale, AZ %Landover, MD

MASSACHUSETTS (3-9, 2-6 MAC)
Amherst, MA

Sept.	3	at Florida
Sept.	10	Boston College #
Sept.	17	FIU
Sept.	24	Mississippi State #
Oct.	1	Tulane #
Oct.	8	at Old Dominion
Oct.	15	Louisiana Tech #
Oct.	22	at South Carolina
Oct.	29	Wagner
Nov.	5	at Troy
Nov.	19	at BYU
Nov.	26	at Hawaii

#Foxboro, MA

NOTRE DAME (10-3)
South Bend, IN

Sept.	4	at Texas
Sept.	10	Nevada
Sept.	17	Michigan State
Sept.	24	Duke
Oct.	1	vs. Syracuse #
Oct.	8	at NC State
Oct.	15	Stanford
Oct.	29	Miami
Nov.	5	vs. Navy %
Nov.	12	vs. Army &
Nov.	19	Virginia Tech
Nov.	26	at USC

#E. Rutherford, NJ
%Jacksonville, FL &San Antonio, TX

NOTRE DAME FIGHTING IRISH

National Forecast: **8**

After overcoming a torrent of injuries to win 10 games and land a Fiesta Bowl bid, Notre Dame has a legitimate shot at winning double-digit games in back-to-back seasons for the first time since 1992-93. The improved depth within the program showed itself early in '15 when running back Tarean Folston, quarterback Malik Zaire and tight end Durham Smythe all went down within the first eight quarters of the season. DeShone Kizer steadied the offensive ship and wideout Will Fuller put it into overdrive, which was a necessity as the injuries mounted and the defense struggled for the second year in a row under coordinator Brian VanGorder.

That depth will be tested further in 2016 with the loss of highly coveted NFL prospects such as Fuller, offensive tackle Ronnie Stanley, linebacker Jaylon Smith and defensive tackle Sheldon Day as the Irish transition from a veteran team to one that is retooling, albeit with several players who were called into action ahead of schedule.

Brian Kelly begins his seventh season as head coach, which makes him the longest-tenured man in his position since Lou Holtz won 100 games with the Irish from 1986-96.

Kelly, who has flirted with the NFL in the past, signed a contract extension through the 2021 season, truly indicating for the first time since his arrival in 2010 that he's in it for the long haul. Kelly played for the national title in 2012 and has averaged just shy of 10 wins per year over the last four.

If the Irish are to reach double-digit victories again — a possibility due in part to what looks like a rather forgiving schedule — Kelly's offense will need to keep humming to compensate for a defense with as many questions as answers.

QUARTERBACKS The old adage of a player not losing his starting spot due to injury will be challenged at Notre Dame this fall. Kizer, who took over for Zaire when Zaire suffered a broken ankle in the second game of the season, led Notre Dame to nine victories — several in dramatic fashion — and a Fiesta Bowl bid. Zaire started and won the Music City Bowl MVP to conclude the '14 season, and then won the job uncontested over Kizer after Everett Golson cleared a path by transferring to Florida State. Zaire is an explosive runner and a dynamic athlete at the quarterback position, which keeps him in the running, as does his fiery demeanor. He might be a viable option to provide a spark to Notre Dame's inconsistent red-zone offense. But in terms of accuracy, touch and progression reads, Kizer has the advantage, particularly since his 520 yards rushing in '15 showed he could supplement the rushing attack as well.

RUNNING BACKS Despite the loss of big-play C.J. Prosise with a year of eligibility remaining, Notre Dame maintains an extremely solid three-man running back corps, led by veteran Tarean Folston, who paced the Irish in rushing (889 yards) in 2014 before suffering a season-ending knee injury in the first half of the '15 season opener. Sophomore Josh Adams set ND rookie records for rushing (835) and average per carry (7.1) when Folston and Prosise both went down. Adams, more of an outside-the-tackles runner with size and breakaway speed, is a nice complement to Folston, who is a chain-mover between the tackles. A third running back, sophomore Dexter Williams, is another promising talent.

RECEIVERS There is no Fuller on this roster, although Torii Hunter Jr., son of the long-time Major League Baseball standout, appears capable of filling the gap if not the elite statistics. He moves from the slot to the X played by Fuller, which should give Hunter some room to roam in Kelly's explosive offense. Notre Dame's other top pass-catching talent, sophomore Alizé Jones, is a star in the making from all starting points along the line of scrimmage. "He's a big target, he's physical and athletic," Kelly says. "He's a guy that we've got to try to find a role for. He can't be in a rotation as a third tight end on the field. That's pretty clear." The rest of the corps is ample in numbers but unproven. Sophomores Equanimeous St. Brown, Miles Boykin and C.J. Sanders and freshmen Kevin Stepherson, Chase Claypool and Javon McKinley all will have opportunities with three of the four top receivers gone.

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN Behind an offensive line boasting four eventual NFL performers, including 2016 draftees Stanley and Nick Martin, the Irish last season rushed for more than 200 yards per game for the first time since 2000. Left guard Quenton Nelson — quick and agile at 325 pounds — is a bona fide NFL prospect in just his second year of duty. Mike McGlinchey, a 6'8" former prep tight end, moved from right to left tackle to fill Stanley's shoes. Another first-time, full-time starter, Alex Bars, could play any

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	4	at Texas
Sept.	10	Nevada
Sept.	17	Michigan State
Sept.	24	Duke
Oct.	1	vs. Syracuse #
Oct.	8	at NC State
Oct.	15	Stanford
Oct.	29	Miami
Nov.	5	vs. Navy %
Nov.	12	vs. Army &
Nov.	19	Virginia Tech
Nov.	26	at USC

#E. Rutherford, NJ %Jacksonville, FL &San Antonio, TX

KEY FIGHTING IRISH

ISAAC ROCHELL, DE One of the few veterans along the defensive front has played nose tackle, defensive tackle and his usual "big end" spot.

TAREAN FOLSTON, RB He doesn't have the size or the breakaway speed of upstart Josh Adams. But the Irish need someone to move the chains in short-yardage.

COLE LUKE, CB Two-year starter in the secondary thrives more on technique than overwhelming athletic skills.

KEY LOSSES

WILL FULLER, WR He scored 29 of Notre Dame's 55 passing touchdowns the last two seasons.

JAYLON SMITH, LB Notre Dame has never had an athlete at linebacker like Smith. Someone will play his position this fall, but he won't fully replace him.

SHELDON DAY, DT For four seasons, three as a starter, Day gave the Irish a maximum effort on every snap.

RISING STAR

In **Shaun Crawford**, who missed the '15 season with a torn ACL, the Irish have a starting cornerback/nickel who provides flexibility on the back end of the defense that was lacking last season. He's small but mighty with excellent football instincts.

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 10-2

The Fighting Irish were a couple of plays away from a College Football Playoff berth last year. Another run at the top four is within reach, but Notre Dame must replace key players on both sides of the ball. While the quarterback battle between DeShone Kizer and Malik Zaire is gathering the offseason attention, bigger concerns are finding a new go-to target with the departure of receiver Will Fuller and identifying three new starters on the line. Improving on defense is a priority, and the Fighting Irish have to replace key players at each level. The schedule isn't too daunting, but the Irish do play nine teams that went to a bowl game in 2015. Notre Dame will be very good in 2016 — but not quite good enough to play for a national title. **Postseason: Orange Bowl vs. Louisville**

AP

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

QUARTERBACK DERBY Malik Zaire won the starting job last fall; DeShone Kizer led Notre Dame to nine of 10 victories after Zaire went down with a season-ending ankle injury. This is not going to be an easy decision. "They're both No. 1s," Brian Kelly says. "One is going to have to be the starter and somebody is going to be unhappy. I can't keep 'em all happy." Kelly vows, however, to have a definitive choice for the start of the season.

'LIKEABLE AND LEARNABLE' That's the phrase defensive coordinator Brian VanGorder uses to defend his scheme, which has come under scrutiny after a) allowing 40 points per game over the final eight of '14, and b) opponents scored touchdowns on 29 drives of 70 yards-plus in '15. "A player that comes here and plays in our defense, he's going to put a lot of tools in his toolbox," VanGorder says. "It's likeable and it's learnable. That's how we approach it. We have smart players."

FROM FULLER TO HUNTER The gap left by the departure of Will Fuller is Grand Canyonesque. Fuller caught 138 passes for 2,352 yards and 29 touchdowns in 2014-15. Torii Hunter Jr. has played all three wideout positions in Kelly's offense. He'll play Fuller's 'X' position this fall, which will put him in wide-open spaces. "I have a good grasp of the offense," says Hunter of his position switch. "It makes life a lot easier when you don't have to panic about what's going on."

MORGAN THE MAN Touted linebacker Nyles Morgan had to wait behind Joe Schmidt, but it's finally Morgan's turn. "What we've asked (Morgan) to do is be himself," Kelly says. "Now that it's not an issue of getting us lined up ... We want that personality to come out. If it does, he'll bring others around him and that toughness will start to show itself."

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH
Brian Kelly

RECORD AT SCHOOL
55-23 (6 years)

CAREER RECORD
226-80-2 (25 years)

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Mike Sanford

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Brian VanGorder

LOCATION
South Bend, IN

STADIUM
Notre Dame Stadium (80,795)

5-YEAR WIN TREND

RB TAREAN FOLSTON

one of four spots but likely will settle in at right tackle. Bars has high-end talent. First-time starter Sam Mustipher has big shoes to fill at center but plays with physicality and a bring-your-lunch-pail attitude.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN It is upon this unit that Notre Dame's defensive success rests. It is the most experienced and deepest of the three defensive levels, led by senior end Isaac Rochell, who is country strong and holds the point of attack like a brick wall. The Irish will need some pass rush from him, too, which is an area where he's expected to be improved. Junior end Andrew Trumbetti offers the most natural pass-rushing skills but is not a proven run stopper. Veteran nose tackle Jarron Jones returns for a fifth year after missing all but the bowl game following an August knee injury. A consistently effective Jones is critical to this defense. The greatest loss up front will be felt at tackle where Jerry Tillery will have the difficult task of replacing Day and his non-stop motor. Tillery does have a loaded toolbox at 6'7", 310 pounds. If there's an instant-impact player in this group, it's freshman rush end Daelin Hayes, who has to overcome chronic shoulder issues. He has off-the-edge skills and athleticism.

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	10	Alizé Jones (So.)	81	Miles Boykin (Fr.)
WR	16	Torii Hunter Jr. (Jr.)	29	Kevin Stepherson (Fr.)
WR	15	Corey Holmes (Jr.)	9	C.J. Sanders (So.)
LT	68	**Mike McGlinchey (Jr.)**		Tommy Kraemer (Fr.)
LG	56	**Quenton Nelson (So.)**	57	Trevor Ruhland (Fr.)
C	53	Sam Mustipher (So.)	66	Tristen Hoge (Fr.)
RG	70	Hunter Bivin (Jr.)	62	Colin McGovern (Jr.)
RT	71	Alex Bars (So.)		Liam Eichenberg (Fr.)
TE	80	Durham Smythe (Jr.)	82	Nic Weishar (So.)
QB	14	**DeShone Kizer (So.)**	8	Malik Zaire (Jr.)
RB	25	Tarean Folston (Jr.)	33	Josh Adams (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	90	**Isaac Rochell (Sr.)**	55	Jonathan Bonner (So.)
NT	94	Jarron Jones (Sr.)	75	**Daniel Cage (Jr.)**
DT	99	Jerry Tillery (So.)	58	Elijah Taylor (Fr.)
DE	98	Andrew Trumbetti (Jr.)	9	Daelin Hayes (Fr.)
SLB	17	**James Onwualu (Sr.)**	48	Greer Martini (Jr.)
MLB	5	Nyles Morgan (Jr.)	30	Josh Barajas (Fr.)
WLB	4	Te'von Coney (So.)	27	Asmar Bilal (Fr.)
CB	36	**Cole Luke (Sr.)**	24	Nick Coleman (So.)
CB	14	Shaun Crawford (Fr.)	21	Nick Watkins (Jr.)
S	13	Devin Studstill (Fr.)	10	**Max Redfield (Sr.)**
S	23	Drue Tranquill (So.)	8	Avery Sebastian (Sr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	19	Justin Yoon (So.)	KR	9 C.J. Sanders (So.)
P	85	Tyler Newsome (So.)	PR	9 C.J. Sanders (So.)

LINEBACKERS Smith, the most athletically gifted linebacker in Notre Dame history, is off to the NFL. Joe Schmidt, less physically talented but the brains of VanGorder's NFL-type operation, is also gone. Former wide receiver James Onwualu is the most experienced returning linebacker at the Sam and a heady performer a la Schmidt. The long-awaited full-time opportunity for Nyles Morgan has arrived as he replaces Schmidt at the Mike. "There hasn't been a lot of talk about Nyles Morgan," Kelly says. "It's because he's been that good." There's a pack of young players competing for the Will spot left vacant by Smith's departure. Sophomores Te'von Coney and Asmar Bilal will make a run at a starting spot, while Josh Barajas is another gifted youngster working behind Morgan. Junior Greer Martini will have a role, at the least, in the dime package and vs. option-oriented offenses.

DEFENSIVE BACKS Underrated cornerback Kei-Varae Russell and physical safety Elijah Shumate will not be easily replaced in a secondary that was incredibly vulnerable to big plays in '15. The Irish have a chance to have a fairly dynamic cornerback duo in veteran Cole Luke and newcomer Shaun Crawford, a small but lightning-quick and intelligent cover man who missed the '15 season with a knee injury. Heady box safety Drue Tranquill is a terror near the line of scrimmage but a question mark on the back end. Early entry freshman Devin Studstill moved ahead of senior Max Redfield in the spring and will be difficult to unseat, due mainly to Redfield's inconsistency. Junior Nick Watkins, sophomore Nick Coleman and senior Devin Butler will battle for time at cornerback. Six freshman cornerbacks/safeties are positioned for a shot at an early impact.

SPECIALISTS Sophomore kicker Justin Yoon and sophomore punter Tyler Newsome are about as good of a one-two kicking-punting punch as you're going to find in college football, and both have three years of eligibility remaining. Yoon made 15-of-17 field goals, while Newsome averaged an explosive and consistent 44.5 yards per punt.

Scouting the FIGHTING IRISH

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP NOTRE DAME

"They're right back in the same situation at quarterback because both guys are going to think they should play, and one is going to be unhappy. It's not the worst problem to have because if you don't have two quarterbacks who can get it done, you're always one play away from your season being over. I didn't see [Malik] Zaire in person, but I'd buy stock in [DeShone] Kizer based on what I saw last year. He's more accurate throwing the ball downfield, and he's a mentally tough kid who doesn't seem to get rattled by anything. If they can protect him, he gives them an opportunity to run more of the Brian Kelly playbook, which they really had to scale down for the last guy. ... The X-factor that could swing it to Zaire is they'll take a step back on the offensive line. They don't have another Ronnie Stanley, and Nick Martin started every game for three years, so that's a lot to replace up front, and they may want a guy who can make plays with his feet. ... Defensively, they've got some difference-makers up front, but they lose their two best linebackers, and I wasn't real impressed with their DBs last year. They did a good job managing injuries, but it's part of the game. ... They have talent, but I don't think they're on the same level as the Ohio States and Alabamas. With the truly marquee players, kids just aren't as fired up about Notre Dame, and he's taken guys who are just a notch below what I feel like are the truly elite kids in the country."

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	28.7	97
DEFENSE	26.6	9
MARGIN	+2.1	49

EFFICIENCY[2]		RANK
OFFENSE	45.7%	23
DEFENSE	40.0%	56
MARGIN	+5.7%	29

EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		RANK
OFFENSE	7.0	6
DEFENSE	5.6	64
MARGIN	+1.4	15

FINISHING DRIVES[4]		RANK
OFFENSE	4.8	35
DEFENSE	4.3	54
MARGIN	+0.5	41

ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		RANK
PROJECTED	-1.5	72
ACTUAL	-6	102
MARGIN	-4.5	112

KEY: **1**-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

NUMBERS TO KNOW

7 The 2016 season will be Brian Kelly's seventh on the sidelines at Notre Dame. In the 41 years since Ara Parseghian left, only Lou Holtz has made it that long. This is a high-pressure, high-expectation job.

36 The Irish offense was balanced between efficiency and explosiveness in 2015. Their offensive success rate of 45.7 percent ranked 23rd in FBS, while their 36 gains of 30-plus yards ranked 22nd. Combine these two things, and you get a fantastic overall average of 7.0 yards per play, sixth in FBS.

5.6 For the second straight year, Notre Dame's defense allowed 5.6 yards per play in 2015. That ranked a mediocre 64th in FBS. The biggest problem was probably big plays — the Irish allowed 63 gains of 20-plus yards, 82nd in the country. You can get away with that if you're otherwise efficient, but they ranked just 56th with a 40.0 percent defensive success rate.

Bruce Schwartzman

2016 NOTRE DAME ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
17 Henry, Nolan	6-1/195	So.	Vancouver, WA
14 Kizer, DeShone	6-4/230	So.	Toledo, OH
4 VanGorder, Montgomery	6-0/215	So.	Buford, GA
12 Wimbush, Brandon	6-1/216	So.	Teaneck, NJ
8 Zaire, Malik	6-0/225	Jr.	Kettering, OH

RUNNING BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
33 Adams, Josh	6-2/219	So.	Warrington, PA
46 Anderson, Josh	5-9/205	Sr.	Chatsworth, CA
11 Brent, Justin	6-2/220	So.	Speedway, IN
25 Folston, Tarean	5-10/214	Jr.	Cocoa, FL
28 Ross, Austin	5-10/206	Jr.	Conyers, GA
49 Ross, Bailey	5-10/202	Jr.	Conyers, GA
34 Williams, Dexter	5-11/210	So.	Winter Garden, FL

RECEIVERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
81 Boykin, Miles	6-4/225	Fr.	Tinley Park, IL
87 Centlivre, Keenan	6-6/225	So.	Fort Wayne, IN
27 Finke, Chris	5-9/175	So.	Kettering, OH
35 Hammann, Grant	6-0/192	So.	Dyersville, IA
15 Holmes, Corey	6-1/190	Jr.	Pembroke Pines, FL
16 Hunter Jr., Torii	6-0/195	Jr.	Prosper, TX
37 Hunter, Omar	5-9/195	Jr.	Harlingen, TX
10 Jones, Alizé	6-5/240	So.	Las Vegas, NV
88 Robinson, Corey	6-5/215	Sr.	San Antonio, TX
9 Sanders, C.J.	5-8/185	So.	Granada Hills, CA
89 Sheridan, Buster	6-3/200	Jr.	Chicago, IL
86 St. Brown, Equanimeous	6-4/205	So.	Anaheim, CA
29 Stepherson, Kevin	6-0/181	Fr.	Jacksonville, FL
26 Webster, Austin	5-11/195	So.	Beverly Hills, CA

TIGHT ENDS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
89 Matuska, Jacob	6-5/275	Jr.	Columbus, OH
80 Smythe, Durham	6-5/245	Jr.	Belton, TX
84 Suttman, Ben	6-2/240	Jr.	Kettering, OH
82 Weishar, Nic	6-4/245	So.	Midlothian, IL

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
71 Bars, Alex	6-6/320	So.	Nashville, TN
70 Bivin, Hunter	6-6/308	Jr.	Owensboro, KY
63 Bush, Sam	6-4/305	So.	Newport Beach, CA
67 Byrne, Jimmy	6-4/300	So.	Cleveland, OH
75 Harrell, Mark	6-4/306	Sr.	Charlotte, NC
66 Hoge, Tristen	6-4/300	Fr.	Pocatello, ID
68 McGlinchey, Mike	6-8/310	Jr.	Philadelphia, PA
62 McGovern, Colin	6-5/315	Jr.	New Lenox, IL
53 Mustipher, Sam	6-2/305	So.	Olney, MD
56 Nelson, Quenton	6-5/325	So.	Holmdel, NJ
69 Plantz, Logan	6-2/310	So.	Frankfort, IL
57 Ruhland, Trevor	6-3/300	Fr.	Cary, IL

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
92 Blankenship, Grant	6-5/278	Jr.	The Colony, TX
55 Bonner, Jonathan	6-3/286	So.	Chesterfield, MO
75 Cage, Daniel	6-1/315	Jr.	Cincinnati, OH
97 Dew-Treadway, Micah	6-4/300	Fr.	Bolingbrook, IL
95 Dickerson, Marquis	6-2/285	Jr.	Marianna, AR
54 Feist, Lincoln	6-2/315	So.	Rapid City, SD
9 Hayes, Daelin	6-4/257	Fr.	Belleville, MI
93 Hayes, Jay	6-3/285	So.	Brooklyn, NY
94 Jones, Jarron	6-6/315	Sr.	Rochester, NY
53 Kareem, Khalid	6-4/270	Fr.	Pontiac, MI
64 Kilander, Ryan	6-0/310	So.	R. Santa Margarita, CA
96 Mokwuah, Pete	6-3/317	So.	Staten Island, NY
60 Montelus, John	6-4/310	Jr.	Everett, MA
90 Rochell, Isaac	6-4/290	Sr.	McDonough, GA
58 Taylor, Elijah	6-3/285	Fr.	Cincinnati, OH
77 Tiassum, Brandon	6-4/302	Fr.	Indianapolis, IN
99 Tillery, Jerry	6-7/310	So.	Shreveport, LA
98 Trumbetti, Andrew	6-4/260	Jr.	Demarest, NJ

LINEBACKERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
30 Barajas, Josh	6-2/240	Fr.	Valparaiso, IN
27 Bilal, Asmar	6-2/230	Fr.	Indianapolis, IN
4 Coney, Te'von	6-1/235	So.	Palm Beach Gardens, FL
49 Hutson, Brandon	6-3/230	So.	Battle Creek, MI
48 Martini, Greer	6-3/245	Jr.	Cary, NC
5 Morgan, Nyles	6-1/245	Jr.	Crete, IL
40 Murphy, Kier	6-0/230	So.	Rock Island, IL
17 Onwualu, James	6-1/232	Sr.	Saint Paul, MN
51 Spruell, Devyn	6-1/240	So.	Warren, NJ
42 Thompson, Jimmy	6-0/215	So.	Hinsdale, IL

DEFENSIVE BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
25 Ball, Brian	5-11/185	Fr.	Indianapolis, IN
34 Bongiovi, Jesse	5-10/194	Jr.	Brooklyn, NY
12 Butler, Devin	6-1/200	Sr.	Washington, DC
24 Coleman, Nick	6-0/190	So.	Dayton, OH
14 Crawford, Shaun	5-9/180	Fr.	Lakewood, OH
28 Fertitta, Nicco	5-8/185	So.	Las Vegas, NV
36 Luke, Cole	5-11/193	Sr.	Chandler, AZ
31 Perry, Spencer	6-2/204	Fr.	Newnan, GA
39 Recker, Drew	5-11/205	Jr.	Lindenhurst, IL
10 Redfield, Max	6-1/205	Sr.	Mission Viejo, CA
38 Regan, Robert	6-2/200	So.	Darien, IL
8 Sebastian, Avery	5-10/200	Sr.	McDonough, GA
13 Studstill, Devin	6-0/190	Fr.	Riviera Beach, FL
23 Tranquill, Drue	6-2/225	Jr.	Fort Wayne, IN
21 Watkins, Nick	6-0/200	Jr.	DeSoto, TX
26 White, Ashton	5-11/190	Fr.	Washington, DC

SPECIALISTS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
43 Chereson, John (K)	5-9/178	Jr.	Erie, PA
61 Daly, Scott (LS)	6-2/250	Sr.	Downers Grove, IL
29 Kohler, Sam (K)	6-0/175	So.	Lincoln, NE
85 Newsome, Tyler (P/K)	6-3/210	So.	Carrollton, GA
42 Riney, Jeff (K/P)	5-10/175	So.	Katy, TX
19 Yoon, Justin (K)	5-10/190	So.	Nashville, TN

2016 SIGNEES

Ian Book	QB	6-0/190	El Dorado Hills, CA
Parker Boudreaux	OL	6-3/300	Winter Garden, FL
Chase Claypool	WR	6-4/215	Abbotsford, BC
Liam Eichenberg	OL	6-6/280	Cleveland, OH
Jalen Elliott	DB	6-0/189	Richmond, VA
Daelin Hayes	LB	6-3/239	Belleville, MI
Jamir Jones	LB	6-3/220	Rochester, NY
Jonathan Jones	LB	6-0/200	Ocoee, FL
Tony Jones Jr.	RB	5-10/219	St. Petersburg, FL
Khalid Kareem	DL	6-4/245	Pontiac, MI
Tommy Kraemer	OL	6-5/310	Cincinnati, OH
Julian Love	DB	5-11/175	Westchester, IL
Deon McIntosh	RB	5-11/180	Pompano Beach, FL
Javon McKinley	WR	6-3/205	Corona, CA
D.J. Morgan	DB	6-2/190	Norwalk, CA
Adetokunbo Ogundeji	DL	6-5/216	West Bloomfield, MI
Julian Okwara	DL	6-4/216	Charlotte, NC
Logan Plantz	OL	6-3/310	Frankfort, IL
Spencer Perry	DB	6-2/204	Newnan, GA
Troy Pride Jr.	DB	5-11/175	Greer, SC
John Shannon	LS	6-2/220	Lake Forest, IL
Kevin Stepherson	WR	5-11/171	Jacksonville, FL
Devin Studstill	DB	6-0/189	Riviera Beach, FL
Donte Vaughn	DB	6-3/190	Memphis, TN

The Irish bolstered their defensive front with early entries Daelin Hayes and Khalid Kareem, added much-needed numbers at cornerback and safety — led by Devin Studstill, Jalen Elliott, Troy Pride Jr., Donte Vaughn and Julian Love — and continued the strong influx of receivers with Kevin Stepherson, Chase Claypool and Javon McKinley. Notre Dame always addresses its offensive line, and the Irish added three prospects with a physical reputation in Tommy Kraemer, Liam Eichenberg and Parker Boudreaux. ND is looking to develop pass rushers out of Julian Okwara and Adetokunbo Ogundeji. Tony Jones Jr. could fill the big-back, short-yardage need, while Deon McIntosh projects as a scat-back/slot receiver-type. Quarterback Ian Book is more of a "system fit" for quarterbacks coach Mike Sanford than an elite-rated prospect. An anomaly for a Notre Dame recruiting class is an absence of a tight end. Two top-rated prospects will arrive in the Class of 2017.

2015 RESULTS

RECORD: 10-3

Sept. 5	Texas	W	38-3
Sept. 12	at Virginia	W	34-27
Sept. 19	Georgia Tech	W	30-22
Sept. 26	Massachusetts	W	62-27
Oct. 3	at Clemson	L	22-24
Oct. 10	Navy	W	41-24
Oct. 17	USC	W	41-31
Oct. 31	at Temple	W	24-20
Nov. 7	at Pittsburgh	W	42-30
Nov. 14	Wake Forest	W	28-7
Nov. 21	vs. Boston College %	W	19-16
Nov. 28	at Stanford	L	36-38
Jan. 1	vs. Ohio State #	L	28-44

%Boston #Fiesta Bowl

DESHONE KIZER

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	COMP	YDS	TD	INT
DeShone Kizer	**335**	**211**	**2,884**	**21**	**10**
Malik Zaire	**40**	**26**	**428**	**4**	**0**

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
C.J. Prosise	156	1,032	6.6	11
Josh Adams	**117**	**835**	**7.1**	**6**
DeShone Kizer	**134**	**520**	**3.9**	**10**

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Will Fuller	62	1,258	20.3	14
Chris Brown	48	597	12.4	4
Amir Carlisle	32	355	11.1	1
Torii Hunter Jr.	**28**	**363**	**13.0**	**2**
C.J. Prosise	26	308	11.8	1

KICKING: **Justin Yoon, 15-17 FGs, 50-52 PATs, 95 points**

TACKLES: **Jaylon Smith, 114; Joe Schmidt, 78**

SACKS: Romeo Okwara, 8.0

INTERCEPTIONS: KeiVarae Russell, 2; **Cole Luke, 2**

Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	NATIONAL
Scoring	34.2 ppg	34
Rushing	207.6 ypg	28
Passing	258.8 ypg	35
Total	466.4 ypg	27

DEFENSE	PER GAME	NATIONAL
Scoring	24.1 ppg	39
Rushing	175.6 ypg	72
Passing	197.1 ypg	27
Total	372.7 ypg	45

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	NATIONAL
-6	-0.46	102

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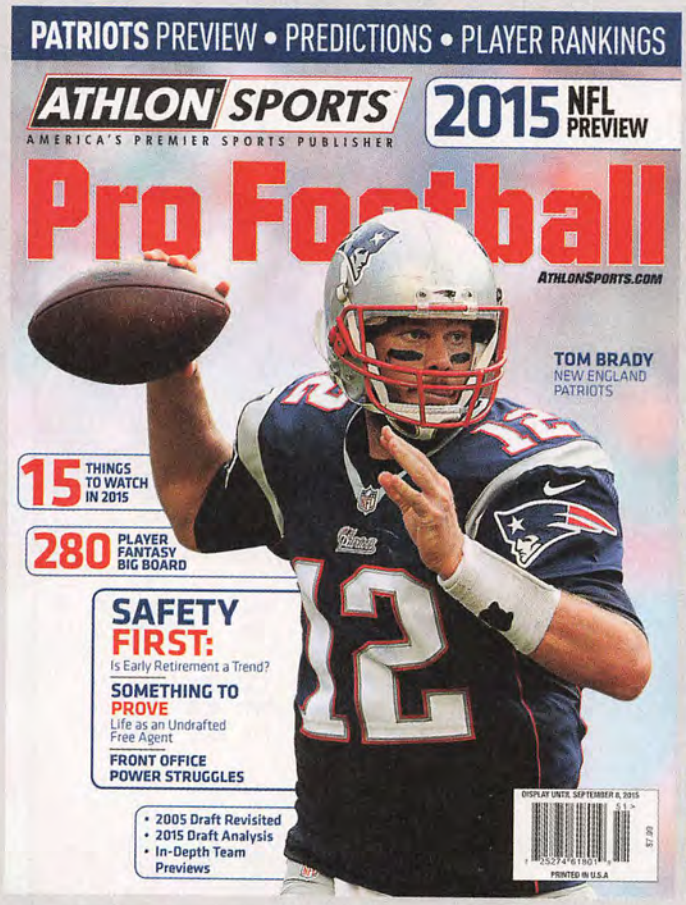

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SEC PREVIEW

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PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

EAST

1 TENNESSEE VOLUNTEERS
10-3, 6-2 SEC

Schedule Notes: The Vols host Florida and Alabama and visit Georgia and Texas A&M in a crucial midseason stretch. Three of the final four are at home.

2 GEORGIA BULLDOGS
9-3, 5-3 SEC

Schedule Notes: Georgia plays at Ole Miss and hosts Auburn from the West. The non-league slate includes North Carolina (in Atlanta) and a home date vs. Georgia Tech.

3 FLORIDA GATORS
8-4, 5-3 SEC

Schedule Notes: Florida plays only three true road games in SEC play but also visits Florida State. LSU and Arkansas are the opponents from the SEC West.

WEST

1 ALABAMA CRIMSON TIDE
12-1, 7-1 SEC

Schedule Notes: Four games, all away from home, will determine the success of Alabama's season — USC (Arlington, Texas), at Ole Miss, at Tennessee and at LSU.

2 LSU TIGERS
10-2, 6-2 SEC

Schedule Notes: The Tigers' two toughest opponents — Ole Miss and Alabama — both visit Baton Rouge. They play Wisconsin in Green Bay in Week 1.

3 OLE MISS REBELS
9-3, 6-2 SEC

Schedule Notes: Ole Miss plays two of the most talented teams in the nation in the first three weeks — Florida State (in Orlando) and Alabama.

Inside the Athlon Sports War Room

These questions shaped our 2016 SEC predictions

Was there any thought to picking any team other than Tennessee in the East?
Not really. The Volunteers, from a talent and experience standpoint, are clearly the best team in the SEC East. They have the right quarterback (Joshua Dobbs) in place — which gives them a huge advantage over every other team in the division — complemented by an outstanding running back duo and what should be an improved offensive line. The defense was solid last year and should be even better thanks to the addition of Bob Shoop as coordinator. There are a few reasons for concern, however. The schedule is very difficult once again: The Vols play Alabama (home) and Texas A&M (road) from the SEC West and visit Georgia, which figures to be their biggest challenger in the division. Also, this program will be under immense pressure to win big in 2016. Last year, Tennessee did not play well in crunch time, losing well-documented leads against Oklahoma, Florida and Arkansas. How the Vols handle the spotlight, and the expectations that come with it, will go a long way in determining just how successful this team can be.

Kentucky is No. 4 in the East. That seems a bit high for a program that has won four SEC games in the past four seasons.
Yes, that does seem a bit lofty, but the prediction makes more sense when you consider that Kentucky has the most forgiving league schedule of the four teams jockeying for fourth place in the SEC East. The Wildcats host South Carolina and Vanderbilt — two games they should be favored to win — and they also get Mississippi State at home. That could be three wins right there, and three wins could be enough to edge out Vanderbilt, South Carolina and Missouri for fourth place. But it's not just about schedule. Mark Stoops recruited well early in his tenure at UK, and the program is stocked with solid talent, most notably at the skill positions. Also, we can't forget that this team was very close to winning several more games in 2016; the Cats lost by five to Florida,

Hurd, Fournette, Chubb, Kelly, Williams, Webb Lock, Lawson, Moore: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports; Ridley, Garrett: Chris Covatta; Davis, Greenlaw, Ross: AP;

SEC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME: ALABAMA OVER TENNESSEE

EAST

4 KENTUCKY WILDCATS
6-6, 3-5 SEC

Schedule Notes: The Cats should be able to take advantage of some winnable home games — South Carolina, Vanderbilt and Mississippi State.

5 VANDERBILT COMMODORES
5-7, 2-6 SEC

Schedule Notes: The opener vs. South Carolina is key. The Dores play at Auburn and host Ole Miss from the West. They visit Kentucky and Missouri.

6 MISSOURI TIGERS
5-7, 2-6 SEC

Schedule Notes: The opener at West Virginia will be tough. The Tigers host UK and Vanderbilt, teams they will be jockeying with for position in the East.

7 SOUTH CAROLINA GAMECOCKS
4-8, 1-7 SEC

Schedule Notes: South Carolina's first three SEC games are on the road. From the West, the Gamecocks play Texas A&M and at Mississippi State.

WEST

4 ARKANSAS RAZORBACKS
8-4, 5-3 SEC

Schedule Notes: The three best teams in the West — Alabama, LSU, Ole Miss — visit Fayetteville. The Hogs play at TCU in a non-conference game.

5 TEXAS A&M AGGIES
7-5, 3-5 SEC

Schedule Notes: With the Arkansas game in Arlington, the Aggies play only three SEC games at home. They get South Carolina and UT from the East.

6 AUBURN TIGERS
6-6, 3-5 SEC

Schedule Notes: Auburn plays its first five games at home, including Clemson in the opener. The Tigers host Vanderbilt and visit Georgia in crossover games.

7 MISSISSIPPI STATE BULLDOGS
6-6, 2-6 SEC

Schedule Notes: The games against the SEC East are manageable — South Carolina and at Kentucky. The Bulldogs visit BYU in October.

three to Auburn and four to Vanderbilt. A play here or there would have resulted in another win or two and a trip to a bowl game. We don't expect Kentucky to be a factor in the SEC East race, but this is a team that should return to the postseason for the first time since 2010.

LSU has been a trendy pick as a national title contender in the offseason. How close were the Tigers to edging Alabama for the top spot in the SEC West?

Not too close. LSU will have a ton of talent — but talent has not been the issue in Baton Rouge. The Tigers have signed top-six recruiting classes in four straight seasons yet have a 14–10 record in the SEC since the start of the 2013 season. During that same stretch, Alabama is 21–3 in the SEC — including three wins over LSU. So while LSU has the makings of a really good team in 2016, there are more than enough reasons not to jump on the bandwagon and label this team as a legitimate national title contender.

Mississippi State has averaged 3.7 SEC wins per season under Dan Mullen and has yet to finish in last place under his watch. Still, the Bulldogs are the pick for last in the SEC West for the second straight season. Why?

It's safe to say that our expectations for this program — as it relates to the finish in the division — would be much higher if it played in the SEC East. But the Bulldogs find themselves swimming in the brutal waters of the toughest division in football. And while they've continued to prove the prognosticators wrong, especially last year, the Dogs make the most sense at No. 7 this season. Through improved recruiting, MSU might be better positioned than in previous years to overcome some key personnel losses, but it's tough to ignore the fact that the team must replace arguably the best player in school history (Dak Prescott) at the most important position (quarterback) on the field and that the top wide receiver (De'Runnya Wilson) and most talented defensive player (Chris Jones) are also gone.

SEC NOTEBOOK

West is best

There's a reason that Auburn coach Gus Malzahn expressed a willingness to move divisions. And it had little to do with helping the conference office figure out scheduling.

The SEC West has been the dominant division for awhile now, winning the past seven SEC championship games by an average of more than 20 points. And in the regular season, SEC West teams are 81–35 against the East, including 12–2 last year.

Is it cyclical? Perhaps. But it might also be institutional.

The SEC West accounted for four of the SEC's top five revenue-producing teams in 2014, according to figures provided to the NCAA. Among the SEC's top eight overall spenders for athletics, five are from the West. The five highest-paid head football coaches, and seven of the top nine, are in the West.

Here's another way to look at it: All seven of the current West teams can fairly be called football schools. That's the sport with the most interest, passion and financial commitment. The closest you come to a school with another sport approaching football is Arkansas, where basketball has a strong tradition. Or possibly Mississippi State, which has a rich baseball tradition.

In the East, meanwhile, you have Kentucky, the basketball-first power, along with Missouri (about equal between basketball and football) and Vanderbilt, strong in academics, not so much in football. That leaves four schools that will always be pushing heavily in football.

Given all that, it's no surprise that the West has been dominant lately. And there's a good chance it stays that way for awhile.

But also ...

Scheduling, by the way, would become easier if Auburn and Alabama both switched to the East, flipping spots with, say, Missouri and Vanderbilt. If that were to happen, then the two biggest cross-division rivalries (Auburn-Georgia and Alabama-Tennessee) would become division games. There's one problem solved.

Then permanent cross-division opponents could be done away with, and each SEC team would get two different cross-division opponents every year, and thus more frequent trips to different schools. Another problem solved.

As for non-conference scheduling ...

The SEC gets criticized nationally for some of its non-conference scheduling. But is it deserved? Not if you look at the opening-week schedule.

The first Saturday of the season has an overload of intriguing matchup with big-name opponents: Auburn hosts Clemson; Texas A&M hosts UCLA; Alabama vs. USC in Arlington, Texas; Georgia vs. North Carolina in Atlanta; LSU vs. Wisconsin in Green Bay; Ole Miss vs. Florida State in Orlando; and Missouri at West Virginia.

Of course, it's not very unusual for SEC teams to schedule big in the first weekend. And many teams — South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky — finish strong with in-state opponents.

So why does the SEC gets the (probably undeserved) reputation for weak scheduling? Two reasons: timing, and the flavor of cupcakes.

The SEC continues to schedule FCS teams, while other conferences have instituted rules against it. There's little chance of the SEC changing its stance anytime soon.

And many of those cupcake games come late in the season, when SEC teams are seeking a mini-break during their otherwise brutal conference schedule. And it's late in the season, when playoff spots are being debated, that the national focus turns to those games.

So if Alabama, Auburn, Florida, LSU or Georgia are in playoff contention entering the second-to-last week of the season, expect plenty to point out that those teams are, respectively, playing Chattanooga, Alabama A&M, Presbyterian, Louisiana-Lafayette and South Alabama.

But that criticism would also overlook who those teams faced the first week of the season.

Saban's coaching tree

The more championships Nick Saban racks up, the more the competition wants to emulate him. Or hire the next version of him. Or someone who has been at his side for years.

Georgia is trying all that by hiring Kirby Smart, who has the benefit of also being an alumnus. But the Saban connection was just as strong a pull. Florida has Jim McElwain, who was Saban's offensive coordinator before a successful three-year stint as Colorado State's head coach.

South Carolina gave Will Muschamp — another one-time Saban assistant — his second SEC head coaching job, despite a failed stint at Florida.

But how likely are other schools to win by looking for the next Saban? It's not an automatic fix.

Jimbo Fisher at Florida State is so far the only member of Saban's coaching tree to win a national championship. Mark Dantonio at Michigan State has also been very successful.

But Muschamp and Derek Dooley both had short stints in the SEC East. And general history shows that national-championship assistants rarely go on to win a title as a head coach.

Fisher did, but that was after a brief stint as FSU's offensive coordinator. Gene Chizik won a national title as Texas' defensive coordinator, then was head coach when Auburn won it all in 2010, but that was the only good year Chizik had, and it was with Cam Newton.

Bob Stoops was the last coach to win a title as an assistant (Florida in 1996), take a head coaching job and win a title there (Oklahoma, 2000).

GAMES TO WATCH

JOSHUA DOBBS

CLEMSON AT AUBURN, SEPT. 3

This game could singlehandedly change the narrative on Auburn's season. Gus Malzahn could be off the hot seat — or make the chatter worse.

TENNESSEE VS. VIRGINIA TECH (BRISTOL, TENN), SEPT. 10

If all goes as planned, this will easily be the biggest crowd in college football history, with Bristol able to seat up to 160,000. The game might be good, too.

ARKANSAS AT TCU, SEPT. 10

Another non-conference game that merits some attention, as a mid-tier SEC team tries to deal an early blow to a now-perennial playoff contender.

ALABAMA AT OLE MISS, SEPT. 17

It's hard to pick which of the day's three intra-SEC West games (Texas A&M at Auburn and Mississippi State at LSU also are on tap) is the biggest, but go with the national champion trying to avenge its one loss last year.

FLORIDA AT TENNESSEE, SEPT. 24

This could be the game that ultimately decides the SEC East title.

TENNESSEE AT GEORGIA, OCT. 1

Then again, this one could be. It's quite a big two weeks for the Volunteers and their division hopes.

GEORGIA AT SOUTH CAROLINA, OCT. 8

The two head coaches in this game, Kirby Smart and Will Muschamp, are former college teammates and close friends.

ALABAMA AT TENNESSEE, OCT. 15

Will this be the ultimate breakthrough game for Butch Jones and the Volunteers, or a reminder that Nick Saban and the Tide are still king?

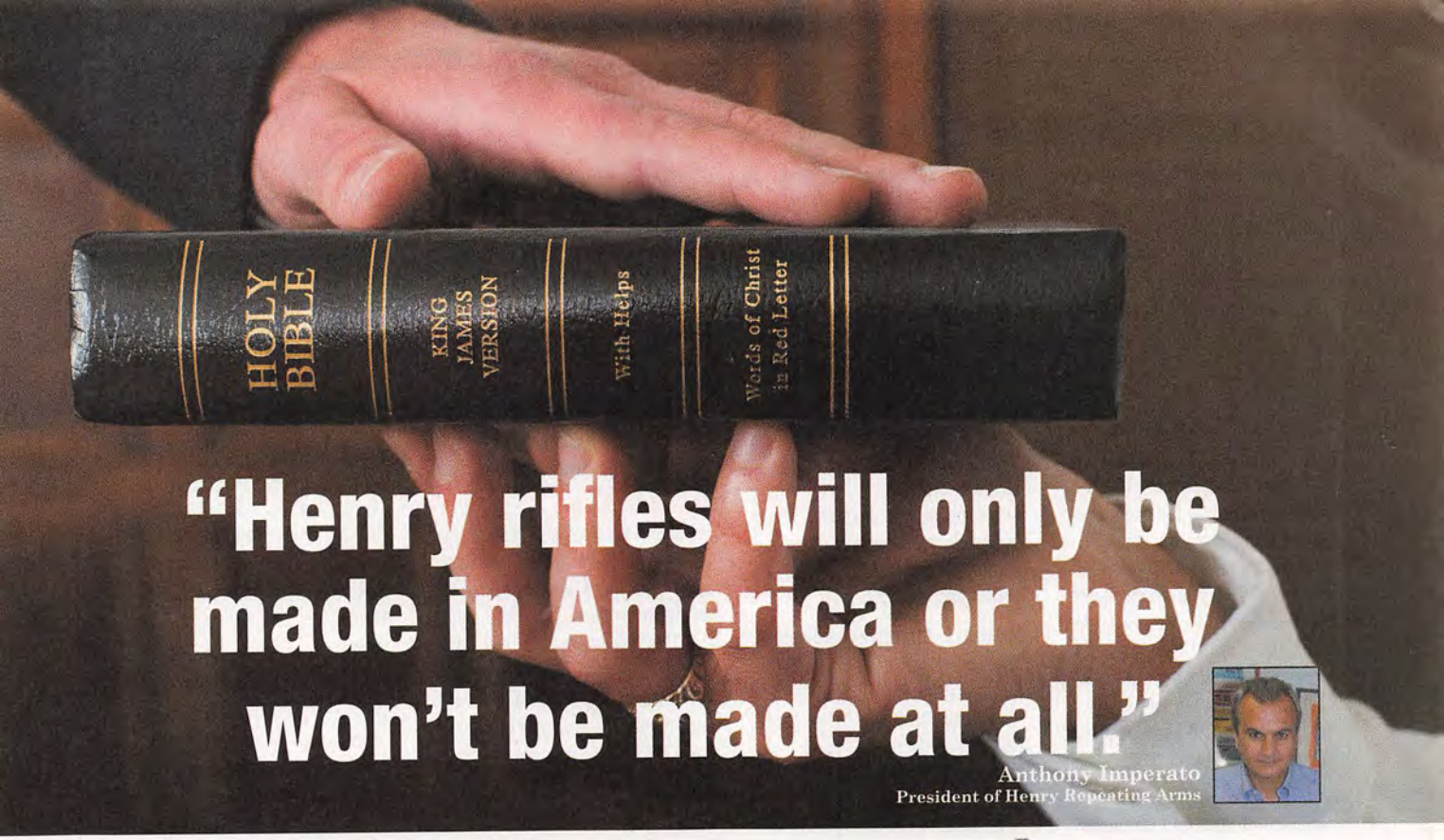
ALABAMA AT LSU, NOV. 5

The final road trip in a season of many brutal ones for Alabama, and this could also be a vital showcase for Leonard Fournette's expected Heisman campaign.

LSU AT TEXAS A&M, NOV. 24

This might be the game that decides the SEC West. Or a job or two could be on the line.

Patrick Murphy-Racey



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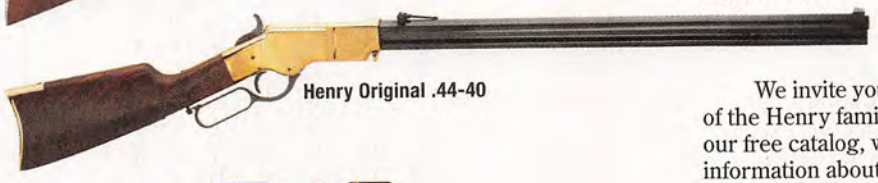

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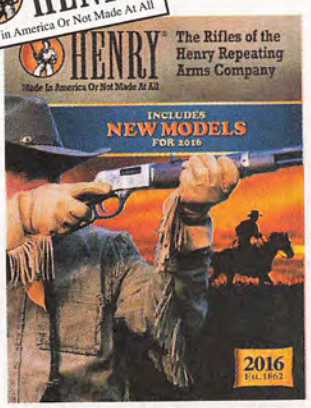

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SEC COORDINATOR CAROUSEL

Alabama — Defensive Coordinator
New: Jeremy Pruitt
Old: Kirby Smart
After a nine-year stint at Alabama (eight as the defensive coordinator), Smart was named head coach at his alma mater, Georgia. Pruitt was the defensive coordinator at Georgia the past two seasons.

Auburn — Offensive Coordinator
New: Kodi Burns, Rhett Lashlee
Old: Dameyune Craig, Rhett Lashlee
Craig left to become the wide receivers coach at LSU. Burns, who played quarterback and wide receiver at Auburn, was the wide receivers coach at Middle Tennessee last season. He took a job in the offseason as the running backs coach at Arizona State but made the move to Auburn when Craig bolted for LSU. Lashlee and head coach Gus Malzahn will be the primary play-callers.

Auburn — Defensive Coordinator
New: Kevin Steele, Wesley McGriff
Old: Will Muschamp
Muschamp left Auburn to take over as the head coach at South Carolina. Steele was the defensive coordinator at LSU last season. McGriff, a former assistant at Kentucky, Vanderbilt and Ole Miss, most recently served as the defensive backs coach for the New Orleans Saints.

Georgia — Offensive Coordinator
New: Jim Chaney
Old: Brian Schottenheimer
Schottenheimer was not retained by the new coaching staff. He is now the quarterbacks coach for the Indianapolis Colts. Chaney was the offensive coordinator at Pittsburgh last season and has also served as the OC at Tennessee and Arkansas.

Georgia — Defensive Coordinator
New: Mel Tucker
Old: Jeremy Pruitt
Pruitt is now the defensive coordinator at Alabama. Tucker was the defensive backs coach at Alabama last season. He has been the defensive coordinator for three NFL teams.

Kentucky — Offensive Coordinator
New: Eddie Gran, Darin Hinshaw
Old: Shannon Dawson
Dawson was let go after one season at Kentucky. He is now the offensive coordinator at Southern Miss. Gran, a veteran of three SEC schools (Ole Miss, Auburn and Tennessee), was the offensive coordinator at Cincinnati the past three seasons. He will also coach the running backs. Hinshaw was also at Cincinnati last season. He will coach quarterbacks at Kentucky and serve as the co-coordinator with Gran.

LSU — Defensive Coordinator
New: Dave Aranda
Old: Kevin Steele
Steele left LSU after one season for the same position at Auburn. Aranda was the defensive coordinator at Wisconsin the past three seasons.

Missouri — Offensive Coordinator
New: Josh Heupel
Old: Josh Henson
Henson was not retained by new head coach Barry Odom and is now an offensive staff analyst at Oklahoma State. Heupel was the offensive coordinator at Utah State last year and previously served in the same capacity at Oklahoma, his alma mater.

Missouri — Defensive Coordinator
New: DeMontie Cross, Ryan Walters
Old: Barry Odom
Odom is now the head coach at Missouri. Cross, a former safety at Missouri, was the linebackers coach and co-defensive coordinator at TCU last season. Walters was the safeties coach at Missouri last season.

Mississippi State — Defensive Coordinator
New: Peter Sirmon
Old: Manny Diaz
Diaz left Mississippi State to become the defensive coordinator at Miami (Fla.). Sirmon, a former NFL linebacker, was the linebackers coach at USC last season.

South Carolina — Offensive Coordinator
New: Kurt Roper, Bryan McClendon
Old: G.A. Mangus
Mangus was not retained by the new staff. Kurt Roper, who worked for new coach Will Muschamp at Florida, was an offensive assistant with the Cleveland Browns last season. McClendon was the wide receivers coach and recruiting coordinator at Georgia last season. He previously was the running backs coach at Georgia.

2016 TOP UNITS

Quarterbacks – Ole Miss
Proven quarterbacks are in short supply around the SEC in 2016, but there's no question about which signal-caller ranks at the top of the league. In his first season at Ole Miss, Chad Kelly threw for 4,042 yards and 31 scores and added 500 yards and 10 TDs on the ground. His 25 passing plays of 30 yards or more were the most by any SEC quarterback. The future of this position for coach Hugh Freeze is in good hands with five-star prospect Shea Patterson.

Running Backs – LSU
Few players had a better 2015 season than LSU's Leonard Fournette. The New Orleans native rewrote the LSU record book by setting new single-season highs in yardage (1,953) and touchdowns (22). Fournette's per-game average of 162.8 yards was also the best in the nation last year. Derrius Guice showed big-play ability in limited action in 2015 (8.6 ypc) and is slated to work as Fournette's backup in 2016.

Receivers – Alabama
This could be the Crimson Tide's deepest receiving corps in Nick Saban's 10 seasons at Alabama. Calvin Ridley returns after catching 89 passes for 1,045 yards as a true freshman in 2015, and Saban vowed to involve ultra-talented tight end O.J. Howard more after his huge performance in the National Championship Game. ArDarius Stewart is back after a breakout season, and Cam Sims and Robert Foster are expected to become more involved after being limited by injuries last year.

Offensive Line – Alabama
There are a few holes to fill, but three starters provide a solid foundation for the Crimson Tide. Left tackle Cam Robinson is arguably the best in the nation, and sophomore Ross Pierschbacher is expected to slide from guard to center to replace Ryan Kelly. Former four-star recruits Lester Cotton and Brandon Kennedy are the new starters at guard, while true freshman Jonah Williams enrolled in time for spring practice and claimed the starting job at right tackle.

Defensive Line – Alabama
Jarran Reed and A'Shawn Robinson will be missed, but this unit isn't short on talent for 2016. Jonathan Allen turned down the NFL for another season at Alabama and anchors this unit after recording 12 sacks in 2015. He will be joined by Dalvin Tomlinson and rising star Da'Shawn Hand on the edges, while sophomore Da'Ron Payne will anchor the interior. Alabama allowed only 2.4 yards per rush and held opposing offenses to 75.7 rushing yards per game in 2015.

Linebackers – Alabama
The steady play and leadership of Reggie Ragland will be missed, but Alabama returns a wealth of options here. Ryan Anderson and Tim Williams combined for 16.5 sacks last season and could increase their production in full-time roles in 2016. Shaun Dion Hamilton is tasked with helping to fill Ragland's void on the interior, but the standout of this group is Reuben Foster. The senior is poised for a career year.

Defensive Backs – Alabama
This position has made significant improvement over the last two seasons, and the Tide finished eighth nationally in pass efficiency defense last year. Sophomores Marlon Humphrey and Minkah Fitzpatrick are one of the nation's most talented cornerback tandems. At safety, Eddie Jackson has thrived since shifting from cornerback and is joined by talented sophomore Ronnie Harrison in the starting lineup.

2016 UNIT RANKINGS

	QB	RB	WR/TE	OL	DL	LB	DB
ALABAMA	5	4	1	1	1	1	1
ARKANSAS	7	10	4	8	9	10	12
AUBURN	12	5	11	4	8	11	9
FLORIDA	8	9	9	9	6	4	3
GEORGIA	6	2	10	5	10	3	4
KENTUCKY	9	6	8	10	14	14	13
LSU	3	1	5	2	2	7	2
MISSOURI	14	14	13	14	3	6	10
MISS. STATE	10	12	6	11	11	9	11
OLE MISS	1	11	3	6	4	12	5
SOUTH CAROLINA	11	13	14	13	13	8	14
TENNESSEE	2	3	7	3	5	2	6
TEXAS A&M	4	8	2	7	7	13	7
VANDERBILT	13	7	12	12	12	5	8

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RALPH WEBB

2015 SEC STANDINGS

EAST	SEC	OVERALL
Florida	7-1	10-4
Georgia	5-3	10-3
Tennessee	5-3	9-4
Kentucky	2-6	5-7
Vanderbilt	2-6	4-8
Missouri	1-7	5-7
South Carolina	1-7	3-9
WEST	**SEC**	**OVERALL**
Alabama	7-1	13-1
Ole Miss	6-2	10-3
LSU	5-3	9-3
Arkansas	5-3	8-5
Mississippi State	4-4	9-4
Texas A&M	4-4	8-5
Auburn	2-6	7-6

SEC RETURNING LEADERS

Passing	ATT	COMP	INT	PCT	YDS	TD	AVG/G
Chad Kelly, Ole Miss	458	298	13	65.1	4,042	31	310.9
Brandon Harris, LSU	276	148	6	53.6	2,158	13	179.8
Joshua Dobbs, Tennessee	344	205	5	59.6	2,291	15	176.2

Rushing	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Leonard Fournette, LSU	300	1,953	6.5	22	87	162.8
Jalen Hurd, Tennessee	277	1,288	4.7	12	48	99.1
Ralph Webb, Vanderbilt	277	1,152	4.2	5	74	96.0

Receiving	REC	YDS	AVG	TD	LONG	AVG/G
Christian Kirk, Texas A&M	80	1,009	12.6	7	66	77.6
Fred Ross, Mississippi State	88	1,007	11.4	5	59	77.5
Josh Reynolds, Texas A&M	51	907	17.8	5	95	75.6

Tackles: Armani Watts, Texas A&M (126), Johnathan Ford, Auburn (118)
Sacks: Myles Garrett, Texas A&M (13); Jonathan Allen, Alabama (12)
Interceptions: Eddie Jackson, Alabama (6); Dominick Sanders, Georgia (6)

2015 BOWL RESULTS

National Championship Game: Alabama 45, Clemson 40
Cotton Bowl: Alabama 38, Michigan State 0
Sugar Bowl: Ole Miss 48, Oklahoma State 20
Citrus Bowl: Michigan 41, Florida 7
Outback Bowl: Tennessee 45, Northwestern 6
Texas Bowl: LSU 56, Texas Tech 27
Belk Bowl: Mississippi State 51, NC State 28
TaxSlayer Bowl: Georgia 24, Penn State 17
Music City Bowl: Louisville 27, Texas A&M 21
Liberty Bowl: Arkansas 45, Kansas State 23
Birmingham Bowl: Auburn 31, Memphis 10

2015 SEC TEAM STATS & RANKINGS

OFFENSE

	Scoring	Rush	Pass	Total
ALABAMA	35.1 (4)	199.9 (3)	227.1 (5)	427.1 (5)
ARKANSAS	35.9 (2)	197.3 (4)	268.2 (3)	465.5 (2)
AUBURN	27.5 (8)	196.3 (5)	173.7 (12)	370.0 (10)
FLORIDA	23.2 (11)	126.9 (13)	207.1 (8)	334.0 (12)
GEORGIA	26.3 (9)	192.2 (6)	185.1 (10)	377.2 (8)
KENTUCKY	24.7 (10)	162.7 (9)	209.3 (6)	372.0 (9)
LSU	32.8 (6)	257.4 (1)	179.8 (11)	437.3 (4)
MISSISSIPPI STATE	34.4 (5)	144.1 (12)	316.4 (2)	460.5 (3)
MISSOURI	13.6 (14)	115.4 (14)	165.5 (14)	280.9 (14)
OLE MISS	40.8 (1)	183.1 (7)	334.7 (1)	517.8 (1)
SOUTH CAROLINA	21.9 (12)	154.7 (T10)	207.5 (7)	362.2 (11)
TENNESSEE	35.2 (3)	223.7 (2)	198.6 (9)	422.3 (7)
TEXAS A&M	27.8 (7)	169.1 (8)	255.6 (4)	424.7 (6)
VANDERBILT	15.2 (13)	154.7 (T10)	171.8 (13)	326.5 (13)

DEFENSE

	Scoring	Rush	Pass	Total
ALABAMA	15.1 (1)	75.7 (1)	200.6 (6)	276.3 (1)
ARKANSAS	27.4 (12)	116.5 (2)	275.2 (14)	391.6 (11)
AUBURN	26.0 (11)	182.5 (11)	222.6 (11)	405.2 (13)
FLORIDA	18.3 (4)	128.1 (5)	182.1 (4)	310.2 (4)
GEORGIA	16.9 (3)	149.5 (8)	156.5 (1)	305.9 (3)
KENTUCKY	27.4 (13)	196.1 (12)	198.1 (5)	394.2 (12)
LSU	24.3 (10)	122.9 (3)	224.3 (12)	347.2 (5)
MISSISSIPPI STATE	23.2 (9)	174.6 (10)	216.5 (10)	391.2 (10)
MISSOURI	16.2 (2)	132.8 (6)	169.3 (3)	302.0 (2)
OLE MISS	22.6 (8)	127.1 (4)	258.8 (13)	385.8 (9)
SOUTH CAROLINA	27.5 (14)	217.4 (14)	212.4 (9)	429.8 (14)
TENNESSEE	20.0 (5)	151.6 (9)	210.4 (8)	362.0 (7)
TEXAS A&M	22.0 (7)	213.7 (13)	166.3 (2)	380.0 (8)
VANDERBILT	21.0 (6)	143.1 (7)	207.3 (7)	350.5 (6)

Webb, Kelly: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports; Allen: Wesley Hitt

ALL-SEC FIRST TEAM

OFFENSE

QB Chad Kelly, OLE MISS, 6-2, 215, Sr.

RB Leonard Fournette, LSU, 6-1, 230, Jr.

RB Jalen Hurd, TENNESSEE, 6-4, 240, Jr.

WR Christian Kirk, TEXAS A&M, 5-11, 200, So.

TE Evan Engram, OLE MISS, 6-3, 227, Sr.

WR Calvin Ridley, Alabama, 6-1, 188, So.

C Ethan Pocic, LSU, 6-7, 309, Sr.

OL Alex Kozan, AUBURN, 6-4, 300, Sr.

OL Cam Robinson, ALABAMA, 6-5, 305, Jr.

OL Jashon Robertson, TENNESSEE, 6-3, 315, Jr.

OL Dan Skipper, ARKANSAS, 6-10, 326, Sr.

AP Boom Williams, KENTUCKY, 5-9, 196, Jr.

K Daniel Carlson, AUBURN, 6-4, 213, Jr.

P JK Scott, ALABAMA, 6-5, 198, Jr.

DEFENSE

DL Jonathan Allen, ALABAMA, 6-3, 294, Sr.

DL Derek Barnett, TENNESSEE, 6-3, 257, Jr.

DL Arden Key, LSU, 6-6, 231, So.

DL Myles Garrett, TEXAS A&M, 6-5, 262, Jr.

LB Zach Cunningham, VANDERBILT, 6-4, 230, Jr.

LB Reuben Foster, ALABAMA, 6-1, 240, Sr.

CB Jalen Tabor, FLORIDA, 6-0, 199, Jr.

LB Jalen Reeves-Maybin, TENNESSEE, 6-0, 225, Sr.

CB Tre'Davious White, LSU, 5-11, 191, Sr.

S Jamal Adams, LSU, 6-1, 211, Jr.

S Eddie Jackson, ALABAMA, 6-0, 194, Sr.

KR Evan Berry, TENNESSEE, 5-11, 207, Jr.

PR Cameron Sutton, TENNESSEE, 5-11, 186, Sr.

SECOND-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	Joshua Dobbs	6-3	207	Sr.	Tennessee
RB	Nick Chubb	5-10	220	Jr.	Georgia
RB	Sony Michel	5-11	212	Jr.	Georgia
WR	Fred Ross	6-2	207	Sr.	Mississippi State
WR	Damore'ea Stringfellow	6-2	220	Jr.	Ole Miss
TE	O.J. Howard	6-6	242	Sr.	Alabama
C	Jon Toth	6-5	310	Sr.	Kentucky
OL	Will Clapp	6-5	303	So.	LSU
OL	Avery Gennesy	6-5	310	Sr.	Texas A&M
OL	Greg Pyke	6-6	313	Sr.	Georgia
OL	Braden Smith	6-6	286	Jr.	Auburn
AP	Alvin Kamara	5-10	215	Jr.	Tennessee

SECOND-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	Marquis Haynes	6-3	220	Jr.	Ole Miss
DL	Charles Harris	6-3	255	Jr.	Missouri
DL	Carl Lawson	6-2	257	Jr.	Auburn
DL	Deatrich Wise	6-5	280	Sr.	Arkansas
LB	Kendell Beckwith	6-2	252	Sr.	LSU
LB	Jarrad Davis	6-2	240	Sr.	Florida
LB	Skai Moore	6-2	218	Sr.	South Carolina
CB	Minkah Fitzpatrick	6-1	200	So.	Alabama
CB	Cam Sutton	5-11	186	Sr.	Tennessee
S	Tony Conner	6-0	215	Sr.	Ole Miss
S	Marcus Maye	6-0	210	Sr.	Florida

SECOND-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	Adam Griffith	5-10	193	Sr.	Alabama
P	Johnny Townsend	6-1	210	Jr.	Florida
KR	Speedy Noil	5-11	192	Jr.	Texas A&M
PR	Antonio Callaway	5-11	195	So.	Florida

THIRD-TEAM OFFENSE

QB	Brandon Harris	6-3	206	Jr.	LSU
RB	Bo Scarbrough	6-2	230	So.	Alabama
RB	Ralph Webb	5-10	200	Jr.	Vanderbilt
WR	Drew Morgan	6-0	195	Sr.	Arkansas
WR	Josh Reynolds	6-4	190	Sr.	Texas A&M
TE	Jeremy Sprinkle	6-6	255	Sr.	Arkansas
C	Brandon Kublanow	6-3	282	Sr.	Georgia
OL	Austin Golson	6-5	304	Jr.	Auburn
OL	Andrew Jelks	6-6	303	Sr.	Vanderbilt
OL	Javon Patterson	6-3	307	So.	Ole Miss
OL	Ross Pierschbacher	6-4	304	So.	Alabama
AP	Speedy Noil	5-11	192	Jr.	Texas A&M

THIRD-TEAM DEFENSE

DL	Davon Godchaux	6-4	293	Jr.	LSU
DL	Lewis Neal	6-2	264	Sr.	LSU
DL	Cece Jefferson	6-1	275	So.	Florida
DL	Trent Thompson	6-4	307	So.	UGA
LB	Richie Brown	6-2	245	Sr.	Mississippi State
LB	Brooks Ellis	6-2	248	Sr.	Arkansas
LB	Tim Williams	6-4	237	Sr.	Alabama
CB	Carlton Davis	6-1	190	So.	Auburn
CB	Torren McGaster	6-0	200	Sr.	Vanderbilt
S	Dominick Sanders	6-0	189	Jr.	Georgia
S	Armani Watts	5-11	200	Jr.	Texas A&M

THIRD-TEAM SPECIALISTS

K	Gary Wunderlich	6-0	188	Jr.	Ole Miss
P	Trevor Daniel	6-1	248	Jr.	Tennessee
KR	Brandon Holloway	5-8	165	Sr.	Mississippi State
PR	Christian Kirk	5-11	200	So.	Texas A&M

RECRUITING TOP 30 SEC SIGNEES

1. Greg Little, Ole Miss
   OL, 6-6, 326 Allen (Allen, TX)
2. Shea Patterson, Ole Miss
   QB, 6-2, 198 IMG Academy (Shreveport, LA)
3. Jacob Eason, Georgia
   QB, 6-5, 211 Lake Stevens (Lake Stevens, WA)
4. Derrick Brown, Auburn
   DL, 6-4, 315 Lanier (Sugar Hill, GA)
5. Ben Davis, Alabama
   LB, 6-4, 240 Gordon (Gordon, AL)
6. Isaac Nauta, Georgia
   TE, 6-4, 237 IMG Academy (Buford, GA)
7. Mecole Hardman Jr., Georgia
   WR, 5-11,180 Elbert County (Bowman, GA)
8. Lyndell Wilson, Alabama
   LB, 6-2, 240 Carver (Montgomery, AL)
9. Jonah Williams, Alabama
   OL, 6-5, 290 Folsom (Folsom, CA)
10. McTelvin Agim, Arkansas
    DE, 6-3, 280 Hope (Texarkana, TX)
11. Jeffery Simmons, Mississippi State
    DL, 6-4, 275 Noxubee County (Macon, MS)
12. Kristian Fulton, LSU
    DB, 6-0, 178 Archbishop Rummel (Metairie, LA)
13. Rashard Lawrence, LSU
    DT, 6-3, 310 Neville (Monroe, LA)
14. Benito Jones, Ole Miss
    DT, 6-1, 305 Wayne County (Waynesboro, MS)
15. Antonneous Clayton, Florida
    DL, 6-3, 235 Dooly County (Vienna, GA)
16. Marlon Davidson, Auburn
    DL, 6-3, 281 Greenville (Greenville, AL)
17. Tyrie Cleveland, Florida
    WR, 6-2, 194 Westfield (Houston, TX)
18. B.J. Emmons, Alabama
    RB, 6-0, 220 Freedom (Morganton, NC)
19. A.J. Brown, Ole Miss
    WR, 6-1, 225 Starkville (Starkville, MS)
20. Nate Craig-Myers, Auburn
    WR, 6-2, 205 Tampa Catholic (Dade City, FL)
21. Chauncey Gardner, Florida
    DB, 5-11, 197 Cocoa (Cocoa, FL)
22. Saivion Smith, LSU
    DB, 6-3, 191 IMG Academy (St. Petersburg, FL)
23. Antwuan Jackson, Auburn
    DL, 6-2, 308 Cedar Grove (Ellenwood, GA)
24. Deontay Anderson, Ole Miss
    DB, 6-1, 212 Manvel (Manvel, TX)
25. Feleipe Franks, Florida
    QB, 6-6, 214 Wakulla (Crawfordville, FL)
26. Eric Monroe, LSU
    DB, 6-0, 185 North Shore (Houston, TX)
27. Justin Madubuike, Texas A&M
    DL, 6-3, 245 McKinney North (McKinney, TX)
28. Nigel Warrior, Tennessee
    S, 6-0, 186 Peachtree Ridge (Duluth, GA)
29. Nigel Knott, Alabama
    DB, 5-11, 180 Germantown (Madison, MS)
30. Michael Divinity, LSU
    LB, 6-3, 224 John Ehret (Marrero, LA)

ADVANCED STATS

The 5 Factors

Field Position

Team	OffAvgFP	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk	DefAvgFP	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk	FP Margin	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk
ALABAMA	33.2	10	2	27.6	22	3	5.6	11	3
ARKANSAS	33.0	12	3	28.0	29	5	5.1	16	4
AUBURN	31.1	43	6	30.4	83	11	0.6	60	9
FLORIDA	32.4	21	5	26.2	4	2	6.3	8	2
GEORGIA	32.5	20	4	28.0	35	7	4.4	22	5
KENTUCKY	27.6	113	13	32.0	111	14	-4.4	113	14
LSU	28.7	98	12	30.0	69	9	-1.3	87	11
MISSISSIPPI STATE	29.6	74	10	28.3	39	8	1.3	53	8
MISSOURI	27.1	117	14	30.9	92	12	-3.9	110	13
OLE MISS	29.8	70	9	30.1	72	10	-0.3	72	10
SOUTH CAROLINA	29.9	62	8	27.6	23	4	2.3	42	6
TENNESSEE	33.2	9	1	25.0	2	1	8.2	3	1
TEXAS A&M	30.3	56	7	28.0	30	6	2.3	44	7
VANDERBILT	28.8	94	11	31.9	109	13	-3.1	101	12

Efficiency

Team	OffSucessRate	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk	DefSucessRate	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk	SuccessRate Margin	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk
ALABAMA	43.8%	42	6	29.7%	2	1	14.1%	3	1
ARKANSAS	51.7%	2	1	47.9%	119	14	3.8%	44	8
AUBURN	44.3%	36	5	44.6%	97	12	-0.3%	70	10
FLORIDA	38.6%	100	10	34.3%	10	3	4.4%	37	5
GEORGIA	42.3%	62	9	32.3%	3	2	10.0%	11	3
KENTUCKY	37.4%	108	12	44.2%	94	11	-6.8%	107	12
LSU	44.3%	35	4	40.2%	57	9	4.2%	40	7
MISSISSIPPI STATE	46.2%	20	3	42.6%	77	10	3.6%	45	9
MISSOURI	30.9%	126	14	37.9%	29	6	-7.0%	111	13
OLE MISS	50.4%	4	2	38.2%	34	7	12.2%	4	2
SOUTH CAROLINA	38.0%	105	11	46.0%	107	13	-8.0%	114	14
TENNESSEE	42.6%	57	8	36.2%	19	4	6.4%	24	4
TEXAS A&M	43.0%	47	7	38.7%	40	8	4.3%	38	6
VANDERBILT	35.8%	114	13	37.1%	22	5	-1.3%	78	11

Explosiveness

Team	OffYds/Play	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk	DefYds/Play	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk	Yds/Play Margin	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk
ALABAMA	5.9	49	6	4.3	2	1	1.6	10	2
ARKANSAS	6.8	12	2	6.1	100	14	0.8	36	6
AUBURN	5.4	86	11	5.4	47	10	0.0	75	11
FLORIDA	5.1	102	12	4.7	8	3	0.5	50	7
GEORGIA	6.0	40	5	4.8	13	4	1.3	17	4
KENTUCKY	5.5	78	10	5.6	61	12	-0.1	80	12
LSU	6.7	17	3	5.2	33	6	1.5	14	3
MISSISSIPPI STATE	6.5	22	4	5.3	44	9	1.1	23	5
MISSOURI	4.4	125	14	4.3	3	2	0.1	71	10
OLE MISS	7.1	4	1	4.9	22	5	2.2	1	1
SOUTH CAROLINA	5.6	66	7	6.0	98	13	-0.4	90	13
TENNESSEE	5.6	70	9	5.2	39	8	0.4	53	8
TEXAS A&M	5.6	69	8	5.4	51	11	0.2	60	9
VANDERBILT	4.5	120	13	5.2	33	6	-0.7	100	14

In this publication, you'll find a series of references to what we call the Five Factors. They are interrelated and are more descriptive than prescriptive, but they are wonderfully useful in examining what went right or wrong for a team in the previous season. So what's the best way to look at these factors?

Field Position: Simply looking at a team's (and its opponent's) average starting field position is a clean way of determining how a team leveraged the field in its favor. A team can create an advantage (or disadvantage) through numerous means — good kicking or punting, good returns, turnovers, avoiding three-and-outs (and creating plenty for the opponent) — but average starting field position is the easiest way to measure the result.

Efficiency: Success Rate is an on-base percentage for football; it creates a definition of success for every play — 50 percent of necessary yardage on first down, 70 percent on second down, 100 percent on third or fourth down — and, over time, gives you a clean, easy look at how well a team stays on schedule and ahead of the chains. Explosiveness, your ability to create big plays and easy scores, is often seen as the most important factor in football, but you still have only three to four plays to gain 10 yards, and Success Rate tells you almost everything you need to know about how teams perform in that regard.

Explosiveness: In a pinch, Yards Per Play will suffice when it comes to gauging explosiveness. From an advanced level, there are other options. PPP measures the equivalent point value of every play by assigning a point value to every yard line (based on the net points an offense is expected to generate from yard to yard). Isolated PPP looks at the point value of a team's successful plays (as determined by the Success Rate equation above). With IsoPPP, you can boil offense down to two questions: How often were you successful? And how successful were you?

Finishing Drives: In this publication, we'll look at one simple measure to judge the ability to finish drives: points per trip inside the opponent's 40. There is more separation between good and bad teams if you stretch the "scoring opportunity" definition to the 40, but you can get a good feel for drive-finishing ability by looking at the typical red-zone definition, too. WARNING: Avoid "red zone scoring percentage" averages. Over time, there is an enormous difference between scoring a touchdown and settling for a field goal, and "scoring percentage" treats them the same. Aim more toward touchdown percentages or the superior "points per trip."

Turnovers: You can look at turnover margin to roughly gauge the impact of turnovers. You can also look into the field position and points immediately created by those turnovers to get a little bit more accurate. To aim at both the effect and randomness of turnovers, you will find in this publication a comparison of actual numbers and "projected" turnovers based on what a team's turnover margin would have been with an average number of fumble recoveries (50 percent on average, obviously) and interceptions (a team normally averages one interception for every four pass breakups). That will give you an idea for both who committed and forced the most and who was particularly lucky or unlucky regarding the bouncing of the pointy ball.

Finishing Drives

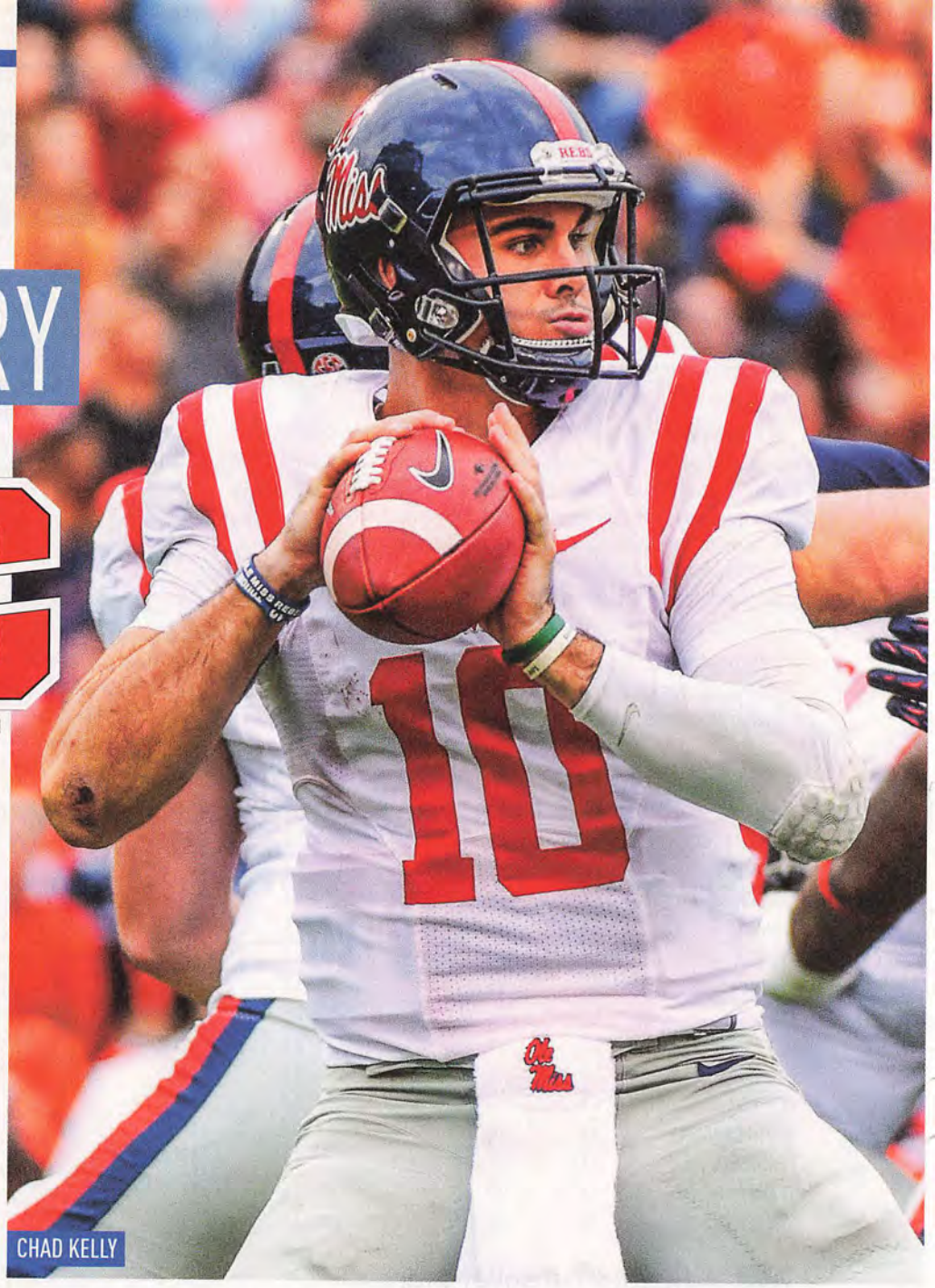
Team	OffPtsPer40	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk	DefPtsPer40	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk	PointsPer40 Margin	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk
ALABAMA	4.3	78	8	3.6	13	4	0.7	30	3
ARKANSAS	5.3	5	1	4.9	104	13	0.4	44	7
AUBURN	4.7	45	5	4.0	33	8	0.7	32	4
FLORIDA	3.9	114	12	4.3	53	11	-0.4	95	12
GEORGIA	3.9	109	11	3.4	9	3	0.5	39	5
KENTUCKY	4.4	65	6	4.0	29	7	0.4	46	9
LSU	5.1	15	4	4.6	81	12	0.5	40	6
MISSISSIPPI STATE	5.2	11	2	4.2	45	10	1.0	12	2
MISSOURI	2.9	126	14	3.4	8	2	-0.5	99	13
OLE MISS	5.1	14	3	3.9	24	6	1.2	6	1
SOUTH CAROLINA	4.0	105	10	5.1	117	14	-1.1	119	14
TENNESSEE	4.4	69	7	4.1	41	9	0.3	52	10
TEXAS A&M	4.1	100	9	3.6	14	5	0.5	45	8
VANDERBILT	3.0	125	13	3.3	6	1	-0.3	85	11

Adjusted Turnover Margin

Team	TO Margin	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk	Projected TO Margin	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk	Difference	Nat-Rk	SEC-Rk
ALABAMA	10	13	1	15.4	1	1	-5.4	115	13
ARKANSAS	7	27	3	-0.1	59	8	7.1	17	2
AUBURN	2	51	8	2.8	29	4	-0.8	85	10
FLORIDA	8	22	2	6.1	15	2	1.9	60	7
GEORGIA	4	37	7	-3.3	88	12	7.3	14	1
KENTUCKY	-2	83	11	1.6	44	7	-3.6	108	12
LSU	7	27	3	3.8	22	3	3.2	45	5
MISSISSIPPI STATE	-4	92	12	-6.5	111	14	2.5	50	6
MISSOURI	-1	74	10	-2.2	80	11	1.2	67	8
OLE MISS	0	66	9	2.4	36	5	-2.4	99	11
SOUTH CAROLINA	5	32	6	-1.9	76	10	6.9	19	3
TENNESSEE	7	27	3	2.3	38	6	4.7	32	4
TEXAS A&M	-6	102	13	-5.2	103	13	-0.8	84	9
VANDERBILT	-8	109	14	-0.9	65	9	-7.1	120	14

QB QUANDARY IN THE SEC

BY MATT HINTON


CHAD KELLY

The season is almost here: Do you know who your team's starting quarterback is?

In some cases the answer is obvious, even if it's not exactly reassuring. (Sometimes a little drama can be a welcome development.) Elsewhere, the pecking order at the start of preseason practice remains a mystery, made all the more mysterious in an era of high-profile transfers, dismissals and early-enrolling freshman that's made rapid upheaval the norm from one season to the next. Proven vets graduate; freshman phenoms fade; up-and-comers come and go. Keeping track can feel like a full-time chore.

If you're just catching up, consider this your cheat sheet. We've ranked every SEC team's 2016 quarterback depth chart from the most promising to the least, with an eye toward the past and future as well as the present. Whose time has come? Whose time has passed? Who's got next? Here's our best guess, before everything changes again.

1. OLE MISS

THE INCUMBENT: It seems like a very long time ago that Chad Kelly was considered a gamble, and given his track record before arriving in Oxford — a dismissal from Clemson; an arrest outside a club in his native Buffalo, N.Y. — not necessarily a good one. As it turned out, the only problems Kelly caused in 2015 were for opposing defenses, which he victimized en route to single-season school records for total yards (4,542), passing yards (4,042), touchdowns (31), completion percentage (65.1) and efficiency rating (155.9) among nearly a dozen other marks. (He added 10 more touchdowns rushing, for good measure.)

THE HEIR APPARENT: Had he chosen any other school on this list (and he certainly could have), Shea Patterson might have found the starting job gift-wrapped for him the moment he set foot on campus. Instead, the most touted passer in the 2016 recruiting class will bide his time this fall, backing up Kelly as a true freshman with an eye toward moving to the top of the depth chart in 2017. Assuming he does, Patterson will be the first Ole Miss starter who actually signed with the Rebels out of high school in more than a decade.

2. TENNESSEE

THE INCUMBENT: With 22 career starts to his credit, senior Joshua Dobbs is the conference's most seasoned quarterback, by far, and arguably the most versatile: In 2015 he led all SEC signal-callers in rushing yards (671) and touchdowns (11), effectively serving as a third tailback in the league's most run-oriented offense. Dobbs could stand to improve his consistency as a passer — his efficiency rating, 127.0, was slightly below SEC and national averages — but given how close Tennessee came to snapping its East Division title drought anyway, even a small step forward may be all the Vols need to get over the hump.

THE HEIR APPARENT: Dobbs is in no danger of losing his job, but those around the program rave about sophomore Quinten Dormady and his big right arm. Incoming freshman

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

Jarrett Guarantano was a coveted recruit, but it would be a major surprise if Dormady were not the starting QB in Week 1 of the 2017 season.

3. ALABAMA

THE HEIR APPARENT: Crimson Tide quarterbacks tend to be more or less interchangeable, and Cooper Bateman fits the template to a tee: At 6'3", 224 pounds, he's latest in a long line of sturdy, pocket-bound "game managers" who are perfectly content to let the defense and ground game carry the day. As a redshirt junior, Bateman is also the oldest signal-caller on the roster, and the only contender for the job with significant playing time already under his belt. If we know anything about the way quarterback derbies are conducted in Tuscaloosa, it's that Nick Saban always defers to experience.

THE COMER: If anyone has ever stood a chance of defying that assumption, it's redshirt freshman Blake Barnett, who arrived last year from California as one of the most highly touted QB recruits in Saban's tenure. Barnett is taller (6'5") and skinnier (200 pounds) than the standard Bama model, but he more than held his own in the spring and will have every opportunity to jump the line of succession.

THE ODD MAN OUT: Whatever happened to David Cornwell? This time last year, Cornwell was widely regarded as the frontrunner to start the Tide's season opener following a surprisingly strong showing in the spring. By kickoff, he was so far submerged on the depth chart, his only chance of glimpsing the starting lineup was through a periscope.

4. GEORGIA

THE INCUMBENT: For Georgia fans hoping the first act of the Kirby Smart era would be to declare the existing QB depth chart null and void, well … just keep telling yourself there's still time. For now, though, the status quo holds: Senior Greyson Lambert worked with the first offense throughout the spring and showed no signs of yielding the job after starting all but one game in 2015. At his best, the Virginia transfer was eerily accurate (he completed 24-of-25 passes against South Carolina) and never prone to killer mistakes (he threw just two interceptions, fewest of any FBS passer with more than 200 attempts), the chief reason he was 10–2 as a starter. On the other hand, despite his efficiency, Lambert's play-within-the-offense approach yielded too few big plays, and even in wins he had a tendency to disappear.

THE COMER: Inevitably, the preseason buzz will center on Jacob Eason, a towering (6'5", 211 pounds), big-armed freshman from Washington with five-star credentials from every outlet that gives them. Physically, Eason is the second coming of Matt Stafford, the perfect counterpart to the lo-fi stylings of a more limited player like Lambert. He was also stuck running with the third-string offense throughout the spring. Whether that's just the new kid paying his dues or an accurate reflection of Eason's place in the pecking order may be the biggest question the new staff has left to answer.

5. LSU

THE INCUMBENT: Look, nobody is saying LSU needs Brandon Harris to be great. There's more than enough transcendence on tap in the backfield, at wide receiver and along the line of scrimmage for the Tigers to survive and thrive with mere competence behind center. But that was all equally true in 2015, which ended with Harris serving up six interceptions in the final five games as a would-be championship season careened off the tracks in November. Clearly Harris has the physical tools and, as a junior, the experience to see a title run all the way through. No matter how loaded the surrounding lineup looks on paper, though — and make no mistake, it is loaded — if he can't come up with the handful of timely plays the team needs to scale the Great Wall of Bama, the season will go down as another golden opportunity wasted.

THE COMER: It's tempting to dismiss Purdue

BRANDON HARRIS

transfer Danny Etling, whose abbreviated tenure as QB1 for a Big Ten bottom dweller was hardly a ringing endorsement for his capacity to lead a team with national ambitions. Résumé notwithstanding, though, there's a reason Les Miles welcomed him aboard: Etling was a four-star recruit out of high school, and it's not hard to imagine him finding his comfort zone as a veteran surrounded by blue-chip talent. In a season with such little margin for error, a good insurance policy can go a long way.

6. ARKANSAS

THE HEIR APPARENT: Arkansas coach Bret Bielema ended what little drama there was by officially naming Austin Allen as the Razorbacks' starting quarterback in late April. He inherits the job from his departed brother, Brandon. Physically, the younger Allen is a virtual clone of his older brother, who turned in an SEC-best 166.5 pass efficiency rating last year as a senior. If Austin comes anywhere near that number in 2016, Bielema may start looking into an actual clone whose eligibility never expires.

THE WILD CARD: For raw talent, the most intriguing option behind Allen is probably Ricky Town, a former blue-chip recruit who served a mandatory redshirt in 2015 after transferring from USC. From the neck up, Town's first season in Fayetteville was a different story: "He never really got a grasp of the offense," Bielema told reporters before spring practice, adding that Town struggled so badly with terminology that coaches often felt "like we're speaking French to him." Still, once the Razorbacks hit the field in March, Town appeared to be on equal footing with sophomore Rafe Peavey and redshirt freshman Ty Storey, and once his brain catches up with his arm, his ceiling could surpass both.

7. AUBURN

THE INCUMBENTS: In retrospect, it seems obvious that the bubble that inflated around Jeremy Johnson last summer was bound to pop — by mid-August he was being floated as a bona fide Heisman favorite based less on anything he'd done in his first two years on campus than on the assumption that any big, relatively mobile quarterback running the same system that exploited Cam Newton's and Nick Marshall's talents to maximum effect was bound to succeed. By the end of September Johnson had been benched, and the perceived invincibility of Gus Malzahn's scheme had been roundly debunked. But Johnson's understudy, redshirt freshman Sean White, didn't fare much better, suffering a knee injury that left the position in flux from week to week over the final month of the season, and occasionally from series to series.

THE COMER: Not surprisingly, Auburn fans seemed far less interested in continuing the White-Johnson debate in the spring than they were in monitoring the progress of the new guy, junior college transfer John Franklin III, who enrolled in January with designs on claiming the job for himself. Franklin has never been pegged as a blue-chip recruit, earning three-star grades out of both high school and junior college. But his size (6'1", 174) and athleticism have evoked comparisons to Marshall, as did his trajectory to Auburn: Like Marshall, and Newton before him, Franklin's detour through the junior college ranks was preceded by a false start at another powerhouse, in Franklin's case Florida State. The pecking order remains up in the air, but that's not a bad precedent to have on one's side.

8. TEXAS A&M

THE STOPGAP: The last time many SEC fans saw Trevor Knight, he was in an Oklahoma uniform, doing his best Johnny Manziel impersonation en route to a 45–31 stunner over Alabama in the 2014 Sugar Bowl. If you're just catching up, it was downhill from there: Knight suffered through a sophomore slump in 2014, lost the starting job outright the following spring, and spent the entirety of the Sooners' 2015 playoff run watching from the bench. On the bright side for A&M, it's possible to rationalize most of Knight's problems at OU as the result of a series of injuries — at full speed, he's flashed enough playmaking ability to envision him thriving in his new environment. But he's rarely remained healthy for long, and the options behind him are alarmingly thin if he doesn't pan out this fall.

THE ONE(S) WHO GOT AWAY: Between Matt Davis, Kenny Hill, Kyle Allen and Kyler Murray, the mass exodus of four- and five-star quarterback talent under Kevin Sumlin defies modern precedent and almost defies belief, especially given that the last three members of that quartet — Hill, Allen, and Murray — all played significantly early in their careers and were pegged as rising stars before encountering turbulence. Regardless of what Knight achieves in his final year of eligibility, unless it results in a championship, a major bowl bid, or a sustained Heisman run, the Aggies will be left wondering what might have been if at least one of his predecessors had stayed the course.

9. FLORIDA

THE STOPGAP(S): For a guy with three years of eligibility left to spend, Luke Del Rio has been around the block. Heck, he's been around most of the continent: Following a decorated prep career in Colorado — where his dad, Jack, served as defensive coordinator for the Denver Broncos before moving on to his current gig as head coach of the Oakland Raiders — Del Rio has spent each of the past three seasons in a different corner of the country, first as a walk-on at Alabama (2013), then as a backup at Oregon State (2014), and finally as a transfer at Florida, where he spent 2015 biding his time with the scout team during his NCAA-mandated year on ice. If spring practice was any indication, he's finally found his niche. Despite a strong push from fifth-year Purdue transfer Austin Appleby (11 career starts at Purdue), Del Rio was the only holdover from coach Jim McElwain's first year in Gainesville and maintained the edge heading into the summer.

THE HEIR APPARENT: The looming question is, how long can either of the veteran retreads hold off hyped freshman Feleipe Franks? To the disappointment of many fans, the local product didn't immediately seize the reins in his first few months on campus, nor did he appear to come very close. Still, there remains little doubt that Franks is the most physically gifted passer in the pipeline, and probably the only one with legitimate star potential down the line.

THE ONE WHO GOT AWAY: None of the above would have mattered in the slightest if not for the premature departure of Will Grier, who was 5–0 as a starter in 2015 and well on his way to living up to his blue-chip recruiting marks before he was slapped with a year-long NCAA suspension last October. Ideally, Grier could have resumed his starting role this fall after sitting out the first six games and still enjoyed two full years of eligibility beyond that in 2017-18. When McElwain refused to guarantee his old job would be waiting for him, however, Grier balked and announced in April that he would continue his career at West Virginia.

10. SOUTH CAROLINA

THE INCUMBENT: Coach Will Muschamp was clear in the spring that he had no intention of identifying a "clear-cut No. 1 quarterback" heading into the summer, a familiar refrain for the Gamecocks after a 2015 campaign that saw three different QBs log multiple starts. By most accounts, though, the pecking order in the spring looked a lot like it did over the second half of the season, with former walk-on Perry Orth (when healthy) at the top of an uninspiring field of contenders. As a fifth-year senior with eight starts under his belt, Orth is both the oldest signal caller on the roster and the most game-tested.

THE COMER: Specifically, the young player most Gamecocks fans have in mind is true freshman Brandon McIlwain, a four-star recruit from Pennsylvania who enrolled early and ended the spring running with the first-string offense in Orth's absence. Coaches like McIlwain's mobility; fans like that he represents a clean slate in the wake of last year's descent into last place. So far, it looks

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

DREW LOCK

like he'll be given every opportunity in the fall to live up to expectations on both counts, but he'll also have to contend with fellow freshman Jake Bentley, a four-star prospect from Alabama who'll join the fray a year earlier than expected after deciding to forego his senior year of high school.

THE ODD MAN OUT: What will McIlwain's emergence and Bentley's earlier-than-expected arrival mean for sophomore Lorenzo Nuñez? While he was extremely limited as a freshman in the passing game, Nuñez did offer glimpses of his athleticism (375 yards rushing, good for second on the team) and seemed to stand a decent chance of overtaking Orth in the spring on talent alone. Instead, he was sidelined by a knee injury and forced to watch as the "dual-threat" torch was passed on.

11. MISSOURI

THE INCUMBENT: There's no way to sugarcoat it: Missouri's offense was a disaster in 2015, coming in dead last in the SEC in both yards and points per game, and Drew Lock hardly distinguished himself amid the broader collapse, posting easily the worst pass efficiency rating (90.5) of any FBS quarterback with at least 200 attempts. Still, there are glimmers of hope that Lock's disappointing debut can be written off as a mulligan, beginning with the fact that he was a wet-behind-the-ears true freshman who, had it been possible, should have been redshirting.

THE ONE(S) WHO GOT AWAY: In the end, most of the frustration for the lost season was directed not at Lock but at his predecessor, Maty Mauk, whose inability to stay out of the doghouse — he was officially suspended twice during the campaign, sidelining him for the final eight games — thwarted any plans to bring the freshman along slowly. Mauk was booted from the team for good in January, ending any hope that remained of him rekindling the spark as a fifth-year senior that helped Mizzou to consecutive SEC East titles in 2013-14.

12. VANDERBILT

THE INCUMBENT: At Vanderbilt, it often seems like "rebuilding" is less of a passing phase in the lifespan of the program than a permanent condition. If the Commodores stand any chance of breaking the cycle of futility under third-year coach Derek Mason, though, it will almost certainly be on the arm of Kyle Shurmur, a big, heady sophomore who boasts the kind of prototypical size (6'4", 223 pounds) and tools that are guaranteed to grab NFL scouts' attention. (It also doesn't hurt that Shurmur's late uncle, Fritz, and dad, Pat, have a combined four decades in the league as coaches.) Obviously, with just five starts to his credit as a true freshman, Shurmur is a long way from thinking about the next level just yet.

THE WILD CARD: Wade Freebeck appeared in just one game last year after starting four as a true freshman, an unlikely trajectory for a guy hoping to supplant a younger player as a junior. But Freebeck did enough in the spring to remain within "a hair whisker" of Shurmur, according to Mason, who also says he believes the collective quarterback talent on hand is the best at Vanderbilt in 20 years. That's a tall claim, if only because Jay Cutler's time in Nashville falls well within that window.

13. KENTUCKY

THE HEIR APPARENT: It took longer than expected, but ready or not, it's Drew Barker's time. After nearly two full seasons as an understudy, the most celebrated Kentucky recruit since Tim Couch finally cracked the starting lineup for the Wildcats' final two games last November, then found himself in the spring as the only returning scholarship quarterback on the roster. Although coaches (being coaches) insisted "there's no depth chart" going into the summer, there was also no indication that junior college transfer Stephen Johnson or early enrollee Gunnar Hoak posed a threat to Barker's grip on the full-time job.

THE ONE WHO GOT AWAY: Barker's ascension to QB1 came at the expense of Patrick Towles, a big, durable slinger who started 22 consecutive games in 2014-15 and put up some perfectly respectable numbers (4,866 yards, 23 touchdowns) in the process. But Towles' production plummeted over the second half of last season — his last five starts yielded a single touchdown to seven interceptions — and in the wake of his demotion it became clear his odds of fending off Barker for the third consecutive spring were distant at best. Instead, Towles opted to spend his final season of eligibility at Boston College, where he's virtually assured of resuming his familiar status atop the depth chart.

14. MISSISSIPPI STATE

THE HEIR(S) APPARENT: There's no replacing Dak Prescott, who cemented his status in 2015 as the best quarterback in MSU history, by a mile, and arguably the best player, period. Coach Dan Mullen didn't feel compelled to chase a graduate transfer or a junior college project in search of a quick fix. Instead, he'll seek to fill the post-Prescott void the old-fashioned way, with a pair of long-serving backups, sophomore Nick Fitzgerald and junior Damian Williams, vying for the top job in their third and fourth years on campus, respectively. Neither candidate arrived as an especially touted recruit, nor do they figure, at this point, to command much attention from pro scouts. But both have seen the field in a limited capacity, and whoever emerges in the fall will have spent years absorbing Mullen's system. That system has yet to attract a can't-miss QB prospect to Starkville — even Prescott was a three-star afterthought — but has consistently gotten the most out of the talent on hand.

THE WILD CARD: Behind the frontrunners, the most intriguing athlete in the mix is redshirt sophomore Elijah Staley, whose combination of defensive-end size (6'6", 248 pounds) and athleticism (he's spent time on the MSU basketball team) make him very difficult to dismiss. Staley lacks polish as a passer, but that's not necessarily a deal breaker in this scheme: If he can replicate the production of, say, Chris Relf, an equally huge, raw talent who held down the starting job for most of 2010 and 2011 — both winning seasons — Bulldogs fans will take it.

FROM HEROES *TO* HOT SEAT

Gus Malzahn, Kevin Sumlin and Les Miles can attest that coaching in the SEC is a what-have-you-done-for-me-lately profession BY MICHAEL BRADLEY

GUS MALZAHN

Kevin Steele's laugh isn't derisive. He isn't trying to make fun of or belittle the question. But he lets loose with a deep chuckle that fairly drips with cream gravy.

So, coach, how much pressure is there for coaches in the SEC?

When you work at four different SEC schools during your career and are beginning a tenure at your third in the past three years, you know plenty about how tough it is to make it on the sidelines in that conference. Steele is in his first season as defensive coordinator at Auburn, a program in desperate need of some help on that side of the ball. He arrives on The Plains after directing LSU's D last year and spending 2013-14 in Tuscaloosa with old pal Nick Saban. A Tennessee grad, Steele knows the conference about as well as anyone. And that includes the expectations that dog every coach in the league.

"It's the same, week-to-week, year-in and year-out," Steele says. "It's based on the last game. Every week, you have to use the pressure for good. You have to use it as a positive.

"You are expected to play dominant defense and be prolific on offense and win every week. If you don't like that, then the SEC is probably not the place for you."

Steele joins the Auburn staff at a crucial time in Gus Malzahn's tenure. Even though the fourth-year coach reached the BCS title game in January 2014, his last two Tiger outfits have managed a combined 15–11 record, and last year's 2–6 SEC mark did not satisfy AU fans, who had to endure yet another Alabama national title and the continued celebration of Saban, who is as popular with them as a houndstooth skin rash would be.

There has been no formal announcement that Malzahn's job is in jeopardy, but another seven- or eight-win season would definitely upset an already agitated fan base. Malzahn's offensive genius, which catapulted him from the Arkansas high school ranks to an SEC head spot in just eight years, waned last year, as the Tigers managed just 370.0 yards and 27.5 points per game. If you're going to finish 7–6 and be boring, you won't gain too much support.

"We didn't get it done as a group offensively," Malzahn says. "It's one of the few teams in my career where it didn't happen. We were young and inconsistent, but I feel we're going to get better."

Two other SEC coaches enter the 2016 season with a similar optimism, and both could use big improvement from their teams. LSU's Les Miles and Texas A&M's Kevin Sumlin experienced surreal campaigns, with Miles going from fired to re-hired in less than a week, and Sumlin enduring the loss of two quarterbacks in the run-up to the Aggies' bowl game. Both coaches' teams share a West Division address with Auburn and — more important — Bama, and they understand that another season of unmet expectations could have them searching for new employment. Would it be fair to consign them to the bread line after they experienced success at their schools and Miles won the 2007 national title? Probably not. But nothing about life in the SEC is particularly just.

KEVIN STEELE

"The competition at this level is stiff," Sumlin says. "It's not for everybody. It just isn't.

"It's a combination of elite talent, elite coaching, big crowds and passionate fans. They create an atmosphere that's the biggest time."

To hear Sumlin explain it, the first four seasons of his reign in College Station have gone exactly according to schedule. The Aggies' 36 wins during that time are tied for the most during any four-year period in the past 20 years. You have to go back to the heyday of R.C. Slocum's "Wrecking Crew" defenses to find a more prosperous quartet of campaigns. (The 1992-95 A&M teams went 41–6–1.)

The Aggies currently have the school's highest football graduation rate since the NCAA began recording the statistic. In 2014, 74 percent of the Aggies earned sheepskins, tied for fourth-best in the SEC. And Sumlin is extremely proud of A&M's APR score (a robust 974, measured from 2010-14).

"That shows discipline," Sumlin says about the academic accomplishments. "The things we did that increased graduation rate and APR are the first steps. Now, it's time to take the next step."

"You are expected to play dominant defense and be prolific on offense and win every week. If you don't like that, then the SEC is probably not the place for you."

— KEVIN STEELE

Aggie fans hope that the next step is SEC contention. While the 36 overall victories are impressive, especially considering the "success" rates of Sumlin's two immediate successors — Dennis Franchione (32–29) and Mike Sherman (25–25) — three straight years without a winning mark in conference play aren't too inspiring. Of course, the Aggies have been in the SEC for only four seasons, and stepping up from the Big 12 to the Big Time was going to involve some sort of struggle.

Sumlin understands that the biggest thing his team needs now is depth. He calls the SEC "a line-of-scrimmage league," and that means successful teams have plenty of able bodies to commit to the trench warfare, especially on those brutally hot game days early in the season. Since 2013, the Aggies have had 10 players drafted, and five of them have been first-rounders. Sumlin is quite proud

Malzahn: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports; Steele: Auburn Athletics

of the high-end A&M products — "I'll take [wideout] Mike Evans back in a heartbeat," he says — but he understands that the conference's best have the kind of overall ability that produces multiple NFL picks, across all the rounds. "We want to have people drafted on days two and three," Sumlin says. "We haven't had that."

The Aggies worked hard to create that depth this year with a top-20 recruiting class that replenished both lines and was heavy on blue-chip defensive talent. With 12 starters returning, Oklahoma transfer Trevor Knight immediately eligible at quarterback and a schedule that features seven home games and the annual Jerry-world clash with Arkansas, there is hope for a step forward. Not that last year's 8–5 finish was a disastrous. Aggies fans need to remember that South Carolina was 3–9 last year. Now that's calamitous.

But A&M started the season 5–0 and staggered home from there. The QB shenanigans didn't exactly instill confidence in the fan base, or the football community at large. People wondered why Kyler Murray and Kyle Allen left and whether the upheaval would influence the decision of Nevada prep quarterback Tate Martell, a five-star prospect who has already committed for 2017. This season will tell a lot about Sumlin's progress in College Station. He insists that the foundation has been established, and it is time for life to begin among the SEC elite.

"We've accomplished more than people think, but we haven't accomplished all we've wanted to or needed to," says Sumlin, who arrived in College Station after a four-year stint at Houston. "We understand that. I can only control the direction of this program, which is moving forward and will continue to move forward. The opinion and feeling inside the program may be a little different than what it is on the outside."

Sumlin expects the two perspectives to move closer together this season. That would certainly help make his job easier.

KEVIN SUMLIN

When it comes to big postseason news, defeating Memphis in the Birmingham Bowl doesn't exactly rate bold-face headlines. Auburn smacked the Tigers 31–10 at the end of December to bring a smile to a year that featured too few celebrations but kept Malzahn's personal streak of 22 winning seasons alive. Few outside of the 59,000-plus who journeyed to Legion Field paid much attention to the game, but for a program that needed a push heading into 2016, it didn't matter who noticed. The win was quite welcome.

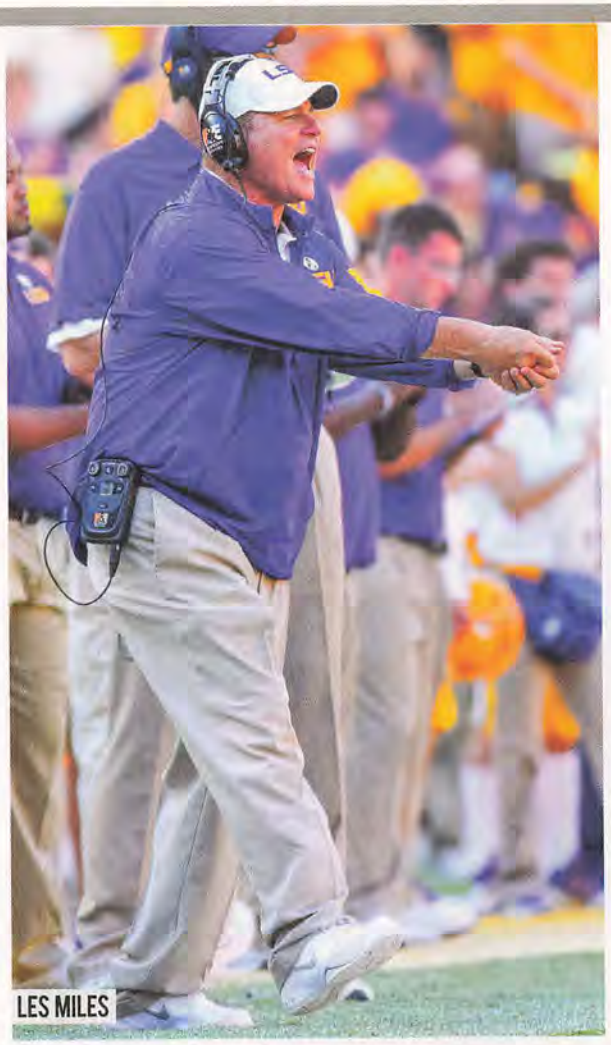
"Any time you win a bowl game, you have some momentum for the next year," Malzahn says. "It helps with recruiting, spring ball and getting ready for the next season. We played pretty well in the bowl game."

The Tigers had several "pretty good" efforts last year. The trouble was that many of them didn't result in wins. Auburn lost four games by eight points or fewer last year, with the most debilitating a four-overtime defeat at Arkansas that came just as it appeared AU was steadying itself after a pair of early-season defeats against LSU and Mississippi State. "If we won that one [against the Hogs], I like to think our season would have been different," Malzahn says.

Maybe he's right. The Tigers dropped two of their next three by a combined 15 points. Perhaps a triumph in Fayetteville would have boosted the confidence of a young team and propelled it to a better outcome. Despite Malzahn's optimism — and what coach doesn't point to a play here or there as the turning point in a mediocre season? — the Tigers' inability to rebound from the disappointing loss demonstrated that they lacked an ingredient necessary to compete in the SEC. The team was young and wasn't so good defensively, despite the high-profile (and high-salary) hiring of Will Muschamp to run the D. It's hard to forget the sight of LSU's Leonard Fournette shucking Auburn tacklers like his little brother's friends en route to a 228-yard, three-TD performance in LSU's 45–21 throttling of Auburn in mid-September. And even though the Tigers hung with Alabama for a while in a 29–13 Iron Bowl loss, they were still brutalized on the ground by the Tide's Derrick Henry, who rushed for 271 yards on a whopping 46 carries, including what seemed to be every fourth-quarter play.

Muschamp has moved on to South Carolina, where he received a surprising

Sumlin: Chris Covatta; Miles: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports



LES MILES

second chance to be an SEC head coach. Enter Steele, the calm tactician whose pedigree and intimate knowledge of Saban and Miles are quite welcome at Auburn.

"Stability is a very big deal at the defensive coordinator position, and Kevin is a guy who will stabilize the defense," Malzahn says. "He has done a wonderful job so far developing relationships with the players."

Steele will make the Tigers more sound and productive defensively, and if Malzahn's offense does its job, Steele won't have to stifle opponents. He'll just need to control them. But the head coach's vaunted attack, which earned him the quick trip from the high school sideline to college football's brightest lights, won't thrive without stability under center. Last year, neither Jeremy Johnson nor Sean White was able to deliver consistent play, so Malzahn convinced junior college transfer John Franklin III, who began his college career at Florida State, to join the fold. If Franklin III can run the run-heavy spread attack, Auburn could climb the SEC West hierarchy quickly. A schedule that features five straight home games at the outset — though two are against Clemson and LSU — could help. A fast start will build momentum. Staggering from the chute could put Malzahn in jeopardy.

"That's part of our league," he says. "It's the toughest league in college football, and the highs are high, and the lows are low. You have to stay consistent and keep working.

"I am definitely looking forward to this season. The recent history at Auburn has shown that anytime there is a tough season, the team bounces back. We'll do that. I like where the program is at. I like where our staff is at.

"We should be able to rebound."

For two weeks last November, LSU football was transformed from a stable, successful program into a reality show. You think the "Real Housewives of Beverly Hills" is crazy? Try "Les Miles is fired. Wait, no he's not."

From the moment Miles' Tigers lost a 30–16 decision in Tuscaloosa on Nov. 7, members of the school's booster community started complaining about the head coach. Forget that the loss dropped LSU to a still-robust 7–1. (It would have been 8–1 if a season-opening game against McNeese State hadn't been canceled due to bad weather.) Miles had to go, and the reports from "sources" emerged that the coach would indeed be ousted.

Losses to Arkansas and Ole Miss followed, and as the Tigers prepared for their season finale against A&M, the mood around the team was funereal. Crying supporters showed up at Miles' weekly radio show. There was news that Miles had told an audience that the game against the Aggies would be his last. No one was digging a grave, but many believed the party was over.

And then it wasn't. Fan support swung hard in Miles' direction. In Tiger Stadium before the game, the crowd chanted that school AD Joe Alleva should be canned, not the coach. And after LSU whipped A&M, Miles emerged safe and victorious, having outflanked administrators and boosters, with a huge assist from fans.

As he prepares for the 2016 season — his 12th at the school — Miles isn't reflecting on the past, even though he pulled off one of the most amazing escapes in recent college football history.

"I have to be very honest with you," he says. "I have always enjoyed working with the young men on this team. They have always played with great effort, and working with these guys and representing LSU has been easy to do. I have never felt like anything on the perimeter that was derogatory has been a distraction."

Even if Miles has a laser-like focus that allows him to eliminate any outside noise, he still doesn't stand on the sturdiest ground. He outlasted the posse this time, but should the Tigers stumble again — and at LSU, three losses are considered a stumble — he will be in danger once more, and it's unlikely he'll prevail again. There are still those in the school community who want a change, and they will be more prepared to affect one the next time.

The best way for Miles to thwart any efforts by those aligned against him is simple: The Tigers must find a way back to the top of the SEC West. That means overcoming the Crimson Tide, who have beaten LSU five straight times, including in the BCS title game in January 2012. A strong collection of returnees on both sides of the ball, headlined by Fournette (1,953 yards rushing, 22 TDs), helps. But much of LSU's success will depend on whether junior quarterback Brandon Harris becomes more productive. Thanks to his inconsistent passing (53.8 percent completion rate), opponents played the vast majority of their defenders inside the hashmarks, making it more difficult for Fournette to find room.

"Brandon has shown more poise and is more confident under center," Miles says. "He has always been a talented thrower. Now, he's much more of a quarterback than he has ever been."

The arrival of highly regarded coordinator Dave Aranda from Wisconsin should keep the defense strong, and the usual influx of fast, angry recruits will provide depth. The Tigers play seven home games — including one against the Tide — and have the potential for big things.

"I like our team," Miles says. "If we can stay away from injuries, we'll be in good shape."

And so will the coach.

FLORIDA GATORS

National Forecast: **21** /// *SEC East Prediction:* **3**

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	3	Massachusetts
Sept.	10	Kentucky
Sept.	17	North Texas
Sept.	24	at Tennessee
Oct.	1	at Vanderbilt
Oct.	8	LSU
Oct.	15	Missouri
Oct.	29	vs. Georgia #
Nov.	5	at Arkansas
Nov.	12	South Carolina
Nov.	19	Presbyterian
Nov.	26	at Florida State

#Jacksonville, FL

Jim McElwain took the University of Florida further, faster than anyone expected, but as his first season ended many wondered just how far the Gators really had come. By the time the Gators collapsed against Michigan in the Citrus Bowl, losing 41–7, Florida looked more like Will Muschamp's failed teams than the school's first outright SEC East champion since 2009, with Tim Tebow and Urban Meyer leading the way. But in spite of a season-ending three-game skid, the Gators believe last season was the first step in their return to the top of the SEC.

"We're the defending SEC East champs," center Cam Dillard said in the spring. "Like Coach Mac said today at the end of practice, we need to come out each day with that attitude. I like [that] we have something to prove. We got to Atlanta. Why not let's win it now."

To get back to the SEC title game, McElwain will need to develop a reliable offense — the 2015 Gators scored two offensive touchdowns during the final three games — despite a litany of unknowns. The Gators do not have an established quarterback, featured tailback or proven playmakers beyond sophomore Antonio Callaway, who was suspended during spring practices. Florida returns an offensive line that allowed 45 sacks, the most in the nation.

The Gators' defense boasts some big-time talent but also must replace several stars, including two All-Americans — cornerback Vernon Hargreaves III and defensive tackle Jon Bullard.

A 10-win season earned McElwain SEC Coach of the Year honors. The encore could be a bigger test of his coaching; these Gators will not sneak up on anyone.

JALEN TABOR

QUARTERBACKS Will Grier transferred, and Treon Harris is expected to change positions, leaving the Gators in search of their ninth starting quarterback since Tebow departed. The competition figures to be between transfers Luke Del Rio (Oregon State via Alabama) and Austin Appleby (Purdue). Del Rio, a redshirt sophomore who arrived last summer, is the presumed frontrunner and is familiar with McElwain's system. But he has never started a college game. The 6'1", 213-pound Del Rio has enough physical tools, but his main selling points are the intelligence and intangibles one would expect of the son of an NFL coach (Oakland's Jack Del Rio). Appleby, a graduate transfer, is bigger (6'4", 235) and more mobile than Del Rio. He also is more experienced, having started 11 games at Purdue. But Appleby was erratic, throwing as many interceptions as touchdowns (19) for the Boilermakers. Plenty of buzz surrounds highly recruited freshman Feleipe Franks, who is 6'6" with a live arm. Fellow early enrollee Kyle Trask is a former high school back-up and project. Ideally, each would redshirt.

RUNNING BACKS The Gators have a trio of tailbacks with much to prove. Sophomores Jordan Scarlett and Jordan Cronkrite combined for just 78 carries for 338 yards in 2015, and junior college transfer Mark Thompson is new to FBS football. Scarlett arrived last summer expecting to push veteran Kelvin Taylor for carries. While Taylor went on to post a 1,000-yard season, Scarlett faded into the background and struggled with ball-security issues. Scarlett's season then ended prematurely after a Dec. 19 arrest for misdemeanor marijuana possession led McElwain

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 8-4, 5-3 SEC

The Gators were the biggest surprise in the SEC last season. New coach Jim McElwain guided Florida to a three-win improvement and an East Division title. However, the offense struggled once quarterback Will Grier was suspended in October, and the Gators had good fortune on their side — they went 5–1 in one-score games and had a plus-eight turnover margin. The offense remains a question with unheralded transfer Luke Del Rio likely taking over at quarterback and uncertainty at the skill positions. A few key players depart on defense, but six returning starters provide a solid foundation. Challenging Tennessee and Georgia in the East hinges on the offense's development. **Postseason: TaxSlayer Bowl vs. Virginia Tech**

5-YEAR WIN TREND

Davis: Tom DiPace; Tabor: Kim Klement-USA TODAY Sports

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

AT A LOSS Among SEC teams, only Alabama generated more lost yardage than the 2015 Florida defense. But the Gators lost more than half (231) of those 454 yards, including 88 by All-SEC tackle Jon Bullard and 54 by end Alex McCalister. End Cece Jefferson, who registered 51 yards in losses last season, linebacker Jarrad Davis (46) and end Bryan Cox Jr. (43) will be asked to pick up the slack.

STAFF STABILITY The one constant about the Gators' recent offenses has been change, whether at quarterback or on the sideline. While Jim McElwain searches for his next starter under center, he is poised to enter the fall with the same offensive staff — a first at Florida since the 2007 season. "When you break down a lot of those programs that have been consistently successful, they haven't had a ton of turnover," he says. Since 2007, the Gators have had 21 offensive staff changes, including six coordinators.

SPREAD THE WORD The NCAA decision to allow snacks to student-athletes fell into McElwain's wheelhouse. McElwain, stealing a page from his 93-year-old mother, Marjorie, makes PB&Js for his players in his office. He uses the time to nurture relationships and impart life lessons. "It's a chance to spend some quality one-on-one time," McElwain says. It has worked. At UF's Pro Day, former Gator Matt Jones said current players "respect (McElwain) a little more" than former coach Will Muschamp.

HOME COOKING The Gators' four home sellouts in 2015 under McElwain were one more than Muschamp had during four seasons. But outside of an Oct. 8 visit from SEC West rival LSU and Muschamp's Nov. 12 return as South Carolina's head coach, Florida's 2016 home slate offers some slim pickings. The Gators' three non-conference home games are against UMass, North Texas and Presbyterian — teams with a combined 6–29 record this past season.

STRONG TIES Transfer QB Luke Del Rio arrived at Florida last summer, but he was familiar with McElwain and offensive coordinator Doug Nussmeier long before becoming a Gator. Nussmeier knew Del Rio's father, Jack, from their days with the New Orleans Saints in the 1990s. McElwain offered Del Rio his first scholarship, when McElwain was at Colorado State and Del Rio playing high school football in Denver. "I felt really comfortable coming here," Del Rio says.

$4 MILLION MAN McElwain's first coaching job paid him barely enough to cover rent. McElwain was 25 and earning $4,723 a year in 1987 at Eastern Washington. He worked as a bartender and J.C. Penney's clerk to make ends meet. In February, UF awarded him a $750,000 raise, pushing his annual compensation to $4.25 million to make him the highest-paid coach in the SEC East. "I've come a long ways," he says.

SAD SACKS Florida's 45 sacks allowed in 2015 were the most yielded by UF since records were kept by the school, dating to 1995, and most in the SEC since 2005, when the NCAA began tracking the statistic. A lack of depth and experience forced Florida at times to play three first-year freshmen, and it showed. Coaches hope those experiences pay dividends in 2016.

to suspend him for the bowl game. Cronkrite arrived with lesser credentials yet had the larger impact of the two freshmen, highlighted by a two-touchdown performance during an SEC East-clinching win at South Carolina. The Miami native consistently ran harder and was a better pass catcher than Scarlett. Thompson is a former four-star recruit and was the nation's top junior college running back recruit. At 6'2", 242 pounds, Thompson is a load with good speed, but the transition rarely is smooth for junior college transfers.

RECEIVERS During his first season in Gainesville, Callaway burst onto the scene as the Gators' most dynamic playmaker since Percy Harvin. Callaway scored a 64-yard touchdown to beat Tennessee, made highlight-reel one-handed catches at Kentucky and LSU, and scored twice on punt returns. His 678 receiving yards led UF and were the most by a first-year player in program history. But Callaway's suspension this spring and 2015 starter Brandon Powell's absence after foot surgery gave several veterans, including 6'4" Ahmad Fulwood and sure-handed C.J. Worton, a chance to finally step forward. Several freshmen also could join the mix. Tyrie Cleveland, the top offensive recruit in Florida's 2016 class, is a home-run threat, while Josh Hammond and Freddie Swain are disciplined route runners with reliable hands. At tight end, Florida loses top option Jake McGee. Junior DeAndre Goolsby and sophomore C'yontai Lewis are more explosive but must show consistency. With 17 catches for 277 yards and a touchdown, Goolsby is as proven as any player on the offense, but he dropped a key pass early in the bowl blowout and disappears for extended stretches. Lewis caught two touchdowns in the season opener but 10 days later suffered a broken hand that derailed his season.

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	81	**Antonio Callaway (So.)**	18	C.J. Worton (So.)
WR	5	Ahmad Fulwood (Sr.)		Tyrie Cleveland (Fr.)
WR	4	**Brandon Powell (Jr.)**	9	Dre Massey (Jr.)
LT	78	**David Sharpe (Jr.)**	53	Kavaris Harkless (So.)
LG	73	**Martez Ivey (So.)**	51	Antonio Riles (Jr.)
C	54	**Cameron Dillard (Jr.)**	64	Tyler Jordan (So.)
RG	64	Tyler Jordan (So.)	77	Andrew Mike (So.)
RT	74	Fred Johnson (So.)	67	Brandon Sandifer (Fr.)
TE	30	DeAndre Goolsby (Jr.)	80	C'yontai Lewis (So.)
QB	14	Luke Del Rio (So.)	12	Austin Appleby (Sr.)
RB	25	Jordan Scarlett (So.)	32	Jordan Cronkrite (So.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	94	**Bryan Cox Jr. (Sr.)**	92	Jabari Zuniga (Fr.)
NT	91	Joey Ivie (Sr.)	54	Khairi Clark (So.)
DT	57	**Caleb Brantley (Jr.)**	93	Taven Bryan (So.)
DE	96	Cece Jefferson (So.)	95	Keivonnis Davis (So.)
SLB	13	Daniel McMillian (Sr.)	25	Matt Rolin (Jr.)
MLB	34	Alex Anzalone (Jr.)	33	David Reese (Fr.)
WLB	40	**Jarrad Davis (Sr.)**	28	Kylan Johnson (Fr.)
CB	31	**Jalen Tabor (Jr.)**	14	Chris Williamson (So.)
CB	6	**Quincy Wilson (Jr.)**	21	McArthur Burnett (Fr.)
S	8	Nick Washington (Jr.)	23	Chauncey Gardner (Fr.)
S	20	**Marcus Maye (Sr.)**	26	Marcell Harris (Jr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	15	Eddy Pineiro (So.)	KR	4 Brandon Powell (Jr.)
P	19	Johnny Townsend (Jr.)	PR	81 Antonio Callaway (So.)

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN A unit that at times fielded three first-year freshmen ended the season allowing 45 sacks. Coaches hope those growing pains pay off for a group with vastly improved depth and experience. Florida ended the 2014 season with six healthy scholarship linemen and entered last fall with just one returning starter. Six current Gators started games in 2015. Veteran line coach Mike Summers now must find the right combination. Two positions seem like locks: junior David Sharpe at left tackle and Dillard at center. One of the big questions is whether sophomore Martez Ivey — the nation's top-rated offensive lineman in the 2015 class — remains at guard, given the emergence of Fred Johnson at right tackle as a freshman.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN With All-Americans Sharrif Floyd, Dante Fowler Jr. and Bullard, the Gators have produced an impressive string of defensive linemen. Caleb Brantley and end Cece Jefferson should continue the tradition. The 6'2", 300-pound Brantley is a special athlete at his size. The next step for Brantley, a junior, is to play with sustained effort. Jefferson lived up to his five-star hype as a freshman. At 6'1", 275 pounds, Jefferson is quick, powerful and possesses a non-stop motor. End Bryan Cox Jr. has emerged as a complete player and will be a leader on defense. Sophomore Keivon-

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH
Jim McElwain
RECORD AT SCHOOL
10-4 (1 year)
CAREER RECORD
32-20 (4 years)
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Doug Nussmeier
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Geoff Collins
LOCATION
Gainesville, FL
STADIUM
Ben Hill Griffin Stadium (88,548)

KEY GATORS

MARCUS MAYE, S A fifth-year senior, Maye returned following a breakout season and will be a key member of what should be an elite secondary.

JALEN TABOR, CB Tabor actually had a better 2015 season than All-America counterpart Vernon Hargreaves III and came one pass defended shy of the UF record of 19.

ANTONIO CALLAWAY, WR Callaway averaged 17.6 yards every time he touched the ball and scored six touchdowns. He also threw a touchdown in the Citrus Bowl.

JARRAD DAVIS, LB Davis finished second on Florida with 98 tackles (11 for a loss) and tied for the team lead with seven QB hurries.

CECE JEFFERSON, DE Jefferson showed why he was considered the top pass rusher in the 2015 signing class, finishing with 8.5 tackles for a loss as a back-up.

KEY LOSSES

VERNON HARGREAVES III, CB Hargreaves was a three-time All-SEC selection and 2015 All-American who finished his Florida career with 10 interceptions and 28 pass break-ups.

JON BULLARD, DT Bullard earned third-team All-America honors after registering 66 tackles, including 17.5 for a loss, to anchor the Gators' top-10 defense.

JAKE MCGEE, TE McGee was the Gators' go-to option in the clutch. Of his 41 catches, 22 went for either a first down or touchdown.

ANTONIO MORRISON, LB A season after leading UF with 101 stops, Morrison came off a devastating knee injury to lead the Gators with 103 tackles, including 12 for a loss.

WILL GRIER, QB The Gators were 6-0 when the NCAA suspended Grier for violating its policy on performance-enhancing drugs.

RISING STAR

Defensive end **Keivonnis Davis** burned his redshirt late last season. He then impressed the veterans during bowl practices. With Alex McCalister and Jon Bullard headed to the NFL, Davis emerged as a force during the spring. "He's been balling every day," Bryan Cox Jr. said.

Maye: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports; Cox: Tom DiPace

2016 FLORIDA ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
12 Appleby, Austin	6-4/235	Sr.	North Canton, OH
14 Del Rio, Luke	6-1/213	So.	Santa Rosa Beach, FL
13 Franks, Feleipe	6-6/216	Fr.	Crawfordville, FL
37 Gornto V, Harry	6-2/195	Fr.	Fort Walton Beach, FL
11 Trask, Kyle	6-4/227	Fr.	Manvel, TX

RUNNING BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
32 Cronkrite, Jordan	5-11/204	So.	Miami, FL
36 Harrison, Case	6-0/200	Jr.	Gainesville, FL
37 Herndon, Mark	5-9/203	Sr.	Ocala, FL
33 Hopkins, Tyriek	5-8/177	Fr.	St. Petersburg, FL
25 Scarlett, Jordan	5-10/213	So.	Fort Lauderdale, FL
24 Thompson, Mark	6-2/242	Jr.	La Mott, PA

RECEIVERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
89 Bailey, Alvin	5-11/186	Jr.	Seffner, FL
81 Callaway, Antonio	5-11/195	So.	Miami, FL
5 Fulwood, Ahmad	6-4/211	Sr.	Jacksonville, FL
10 Hammond, Josh	6-1/184	Fr.	Hallandale, FL
3 Harris, Treon	5-11/201	Jr.	Miami, FL
87 Jackson, Kalif	6-4/215	Fr.	Neptune Beach, FL
43 Jarriel, Glenn	5-8/176	Fr.	Okeechobee, FL
9 Massey, Dre	5-9/183	Jr.	Greenville, SC
46 O'Neal, Isaac	5-9/189	Fr.	Lakeland, FL
4 Powell, Brandon	5-9/184	Jr.	Deerfield Beach, FL
88 Sousa, Ryan	6-0/190	So.	Orlando, FL
16 Swain, Freddie	6-0/180	Fr.	Ocala, FL
85 Thompson, Chris	6-0/170	Sr.	Gainesville, FL
18 Worton, C.J.	6-0/194	So.	Homestead, FL

TIGHT ENDS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
16 Fallace, Brian	6-4/210	So.	Satellite Beach, FL
39 Ferguson, Ryan	6-3/219	So.	Largo, FL
30 Goolsby, DeAndre	6-4/240	Jr.	Derby, KS
84 Knight, Camrin	6-3/237	So.	Tallahassee, FL
80 Lewis, C'yontai	6-4/230	So.	Eutaw, AL
18 Proctor, Anderson	6-3/224	Jr.	Vero Beach, FL
82 Stephens, Moral	6-3/247	So.	Perry, FL

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
76 Benalcazar, Marcel	6-7/333	Sr.	Miramar, FL
66 Buchanan, Nick	6-2/309	Fr.	Dunwoody, GA
68 Desir-Jones, Richerd	6-4/297	Fr.	Fort Lauderdale, FL
54 Dillard, Cameron	6-4/308	Jr.	Canton, MI
72 Forsythe, Stone	6-7/314	Fr.	Winter Garden, FL
69 Givens, Marcus	6-0/272	Fr.	St. Augustine, FL
53 Harkless, Kavaris	6-5/307	So.	Jacksonville, FL
73 Ivey, Martez	6-5/312	So.	Apopka, FL
74 Johnson, Fred	6-6/315	So.	West Palm Beach, FL
64 Jordan, Tyler	6-4/295	So.	Jacksonville, FL
59 McCoy, T.J.	6-1/295	Fr.	Clermont, FL
77 Mike, Andrew	6-6/303	So.	Tucson, AZ
51 Riles, Antonio	6-4/311	Jr.	Lawrenceville, GA
67 Sandifer, Brandon	6-3/339	Fr.	Warner Robins, GA
78 Sharpe, David	6-6/347	Jr.	Jacksonville, FL
60 Shinn, Zach	6-2/287	So.	Plant City, FL
71 Villano, Nick	6-2/293	Fr.	Wellington, FL
79 Welch, Donovan	6-4/263	Fr.	Clermont, FL

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
98 Ancrum, Luke	6-5/257	Fr.	Sebring, FL
57 Brantley, Caleb	6-2/300	Jr.	Crescent City, FL
93 Bryan, Taven	6-5/293	So.	Casper, WY
54 Clark, Khairi	6-2/326	So.	Hollywood, FL
94 Cox, Bryan	6-3/260	Sr.	Fort Lauderdale, FL
95 Davis, Keivonnis	6-4/244	So.	Miami, FL
55 Holley, Thomas	6-3/260	So.	Brooklyn, NY
62 Ivie, Andrew	6-1/278	Fr.	Dade City, FL
91 Ivie, Joey	6-3/290	Sr.	Dade City, FL
96 Jefferson, Cece	6-1/275	So.	Glen St. Mary, FL
70 Palmore, Forrest	6-2/264	So.	Punta Gorda, FL
97 Reed, Justus	6-3/242	So.	Clearwater, FL
17 Sherit, Jordan	6-4/251	Jr.	Tampa, FL
42 Smith, Jordan	6-5/238	Fr.	Lithonia, GA
92 Zuniga, Jabari	6-3/240	Fr.	Marietta, GA

LINEBACKERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
34 Anzalone, Alex	6-3/237	Jr.	Wyomissing, PA
40 Davis, Jarrad	6-2/240	Sr.	Kingsland, GA
56 Garcia, Cristian	6-1/233	Jr.	Miami, FL
44 Jackson, Rayshad	6-0/220	Fr.	Miami, FL
28 Johnson, Kylan	6-1/228	Fr.	Dallas, TX
58 Lawrence, Jahim	5-11/223	Fr.	Hollywood, FL
13 McMillian, Daniel	6-1/227	Sr.	Jacksonville, FL
45 Raymond, R.J.	6-2/247	So.	Atlantic Beach, FL
33 Reese, David	6-0/239	Fr.	Farmington, MI
25 Rolin, Matt	6-3/220	Jr.	Ashburn, VA
41 Singletary, Darius	6-1/203	Fr.	Jacksonville, FL
52 Stipe, Steven	5-11/210	Jr.	Waycross, GA
46 Thomas, Will	5-9/226	Fr.	Dunnellon, FL

DEFENSIVE BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
21 Burnett, McArthur	5-9/172	Fr.	Pahokee, FL
7 Dawson, Duke	5-10/202	Jr.	Cross City, FL
23 Gardner, Chauncey	5-11/205	Fr.	Cocoa, FL
36 Giles, Eddie	5-9/164	So.	Jupiter, FL
26 Harris, Marcell	6-1/207	Jr.	Orlando, FL
39 Iorio, Michael	5-10/197	Sr.	Nokomis, FL
20 Maye, Marcus	6-0/210	Sr.	Melbourne, FL
43 Norvelis, Mark	5-10/193	Sr.	Palm Bay, FL
30 Stephens, Garrett	5-9/182	Jr.	Louisville, KY
31 Tabor, Jalen	6-0/199	Jr.	Washington, DC
8 Washington, Nick	6-0/198	Jr.	Jacksonville, FL
14 Williamson, Chris	5-11/192	So.	Gainesville, GA
6 Wilson, Quincy	6-1/211	Jr.	Fort Lauderdale, FL

SPECIALISTS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
41 Farr, Ryan (LS)	6-0/220	So.	Henderson, NV
97 Gould, Jon (P)	6-0/185	Fr.	Elkridge, MD
49 Grimm, Devin (LS)	6-1/186	So.	St. Johns, FL
47 Haney, Jonathan (LS)	6-2/225	Sr.	Tampa, FL
38 MacInnes, Neil (K)	6-4/216	Sr.	Tampa, FL
15 Pineiro, Eddy (K)	6-0/183	So.	Miami, FL
98 Powell, Jorge (K)	5-10/166	So.	Coral Gables, FL
49 Tilghman, Jacob (LS)	6-1/207	Fr.	Daytona Beach, FL
19 Townsend, Johnny (P)	6-1/210	Jr.	Orlando, FL

Scouting the GATORS

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP FLORIDA

"I don't know if anyone has deserved SEC Coach of the Year more than Jim McElwain last year because they coached their everloving tail off on offense to get as close as they got (to a championship). They just didn't have the same talent as anyone else on offense in that league. Their offensive line was extremely weak and losing the quarterback killed them, but let me tell you, they are tough schematically because of all the shifts and motions. We played them with Will Grier, and we just had so much trouble. Out of the first 44 snaps they gave me 38 formations, and he was really, really good. I never really felt like I could get a bead on what they were doing. ... They didn't play as well once they lost their quarterback, and it looked like on film they didn't do a great job of adapting to Treon Harris, but that was a good team with Grier. ... I don't know if they're talented enough offensively, but McElwain has always done a great job of getting the ball in the hands of his best players. ... They were unreal on defense last year, just a bunch of talented and freakish guys. They're resting on the laurels of some pretty good recruiting classes Will Muschamp put together, but our offensive staff was really impressed with Geoff Collins. They're going to need some of their younger guys to step up because they lost some studs between Vernon Hargreaves and Keanu Neal, who is going to play in the NFL for a long, long time. But they do have Quincy Wilson coming back with Jalen Tabor so they're going to be solid on the back end."

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: (10-4, 7-1)

Sept.	5	New Mexico State	W	61-13
Sept.	12	East Carolina	W	31-24
Sept.	19	at Kentucky	W	14-9
Sept.	26	Tennessee	W	28-27
Oct.	3	Ole Miss	W	38-10
Oct.	10	at Missouri	W	21-3
Oct.	17	at LSU	L	28-35
Oct.	31	vs. Georgia %	W	27-3
Nov.	7	Vanderbilt	W	9-7
Nov.	14	at South Carolina	W	24-14
Nov.	21	Florida Atlantic (ot)	W	20-14
Nov.	28	Florida State	L	2-27
Dec.	5	vs. Alabama &	L	14-29
Jan.	1	vs. Michigan #	L	7-41

%Jacksonville &Atlanta #Citrus Bowl

BRYAN COX JR.

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Treon Harris	**235**	**119**	**1,676**	**9**	**6**
Will Grier	161	106	1,204	10	3

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Kelvin Taylor	259	1,035	4.0	13
Treon Harris	**96**	**238**	**2.5**	**0**
Jordan Scarlett	**34**	**181**	**5.3**	**1**
Jordan Cronkrite	**44**	**157**	**3.6**	**3**

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Demarcus Robinson	48	522	10.9	2
Jake McGee	41	381	9.3	4
Antonio Callaway	**35**	**678**	**19.4**	**4**
Brandon Powell	**29**	**390**	**13.4**	**3**

KICKING: **Austin Hardin, 4-14 FGs, 24-27 XPs, 39 points**

TACKLES: Antonio Morrison, 103; **Jarrad Davis, 98**

SACKS: Two players tied with 6.5

INTERCEPTIONS: Two players tied with 4

Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	23.2 ppg	11	100
Rushing	126.9 ypg	13	113
Passing	207.1 ypg	8	87
Total	334.0 ypg	12	112

DEFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	18.3 ppg	4	11
Rushing	128.1 ypg	5	25
Passing	182.1 ypg	4	13
Total	310.2 ypg	4	8

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
+8	+0.57	3	27

CECE JEFFERSON

nis Davis and redshirt freshman Jabari Zuniga, a pair of ends, have received rave reviews from teammates. Senior Joey Ivie and sophomores Taven Bryan and Khairi Clark are capable in the middle, while junior Jordan Sherit gives all-out effort off the edge.

LINEBACKERS Randy Shannon coached some of the game's top linebackers at Miami. He sees their best qualities in senior Jarrad Davis, whose speed and nose for the ball are special. "He's competitive like Jon Vilma was. Athletically he has Jon Beason-ness, the speed and the power, and the knowledge like Ray [Lewis]," Shannon says. In the wake of Florida's SEC title game loss to Alabama, Davis announced his plans to return to school and go out on the right note. Davis admitted it was strange the first day of spring ball without Hargreaves, Bullard and Antonio Morrison, UF's leading tackler in 2014 and 2015. Yet, Davis embraces the role of defensive leader. Alex Anzalone is fast and tenacious, but he sustained a season-ending shoulder injury in Week 2 and was limited in the spring. Senior Daniel McMillian's move to the strong side has suited him, while early enrollee David Reese quickly has emerged in the middle.

DEFENSIVE BACKS The 2015 Gators boasted one of the nation's most talented secondaries and made claim to the fictional title of DBU (Defensive Backs University). UF should be strong again on the back end of the defense but must replace Hargreaves and hard-hitting safety Keanu Neal, a pair of future NFL stars. All-SEC cornerback Jalen Tabor is back after he tied for the league lead with 18 passes defended. Fellow junior Quincy Wilson should be solid on the other side. Senior safety Marcus Maye surprisingly returned to Florida after a breakout season. Questions abound beyond that trio. Safety Nick Washington and nickel back Duke Dawson will have expanded roles, while true freshman Chauncey Gardner will play. And is this the year junior safety Marcell Harris finally fulfills his promise?

SPECIALISTS Placekicker Eddy Pineiro has never played in a game, but rarely has a specialist generated such offseason buzz in Gainesville. UF missed 10-of-17 field goals in 2015, with Austin Hardin going 5-of-14. No Power 5 team had a worse extra-point percentage than UF (.878). Enter Pineiro, a 20-year-old Miami native who changed his commitment from Alabama. Pineiro became a YouTube sensation with a video of him nailing a 77-yard field goal in practice. Now he must prove he can handle game pressure. Punter Johnny Townsend has been one of the team's clutch performers. Townsend averaged 45.4 yards per punt, and his 51.8 punting average against Alabama was the highest in SEC Championship Game history.

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	32.4	21
DEFENSE	26.2	4
MARGIN	+6.2	8
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	38.6%	100
DEFENSE	34.3%	10
MARGIN	+4.3%	37
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	5.1	102
DEFENSE	4.7	8
MARGIN	+0.4	50
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	3.8	114
DEFENSE	4.3	53
MARGIN	-0.5	95
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	6.1	15
ACTUAL	8	22
MARGIN	+1.9	60

NUMBERS TO KNOW

KEY: **1**-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

13.2 The Florida defense did its part. The Gators invaded backfields with ease; they stopped 23.9 percent of rushes at or behind the line of scrimmage (16th in FBS), and on passing downs (second-and-8 or more, third-and-5 or more, fourth-and-5 or more), they recorded sacks on 13.2 percent of pass attempts (fourth).

32.4 Special teams also did their part. Antonio Callaway had six punt returns of at least 20 yards and averaged 15.5 yards per return, fifth in FBS. Forcing three-and-outs and breaking off big punt returns meant the Gators' offense was already starting off with good field position (average start: the 32.4, 21st in FBS). Things didn't go awry until the offense took the field.

15.1 Things fell apart quickly for the Gators at the end of the season. After overachieving against the Vegas line by 8.8 points per game in their first eight games, they underachieved by an average of 15.1 points per game in their final six. On three occasions (the games against FAU, Florida State, and Michigan), they underachieved by more than three touchdowns.

12.8 The reason for the Gators' late-season collapse was obvious. In those first eight games, Florida averaged 31 points per game and a decent 5.6 yards per play. But while the offense looked decent for a couple of games after Will Grier's suspension, it didn't last. Last six games: 12.8 points per game and 4.4 yards per play.

Tom DiPace

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION

Defensive Backs	6
Wide Receivers	5
Defensive Linemen	3
Linebackers	3
Offensive Linemen	3
Quarterbacks	2
Running Backs	2
Kickers	1

BY STATE

Florida	13
Alabama	3
Georgia	2
Texas	2
Michigan	1
Mississippi	1
Pennsylvania	1
Rhode Island	1
South Carolina	1

Unlike a 2015 National Signing Day surge, the Gators had a sluggish close this past February and fell from No. 6 to No. 13 in the 247Sports Composite rankings.

UF received an early boost when wide receiver Tyrie Cleveland signed, but moments later the Gators lost their only interior defensive line commitment, Shavar Manuel, who flipped to Florida State. Later, Florida's only pure cornerback in the 2016 class, Aaron Robinson, changed his commitment to Alabama. UF also failed to lure cornerback Kristian Fulton away from LSU.

The Gators still addressed some key needs, beginning with pass rusher Antonneous Clayton. Clayton is Florida's highest-rated signee and has the first step and relentless style to be a star. He totaled 27 tackles for a loss (nine sacks) and 13 quarterback hurries in 2015.

Defensive back Chauncey Gardner, another four-star signee, is expected to have an immediate impact at safety, while linebacker David Reese adds much-needed depth and could be a valuable special teams player.

With three offensive line signees, Florida continued to add to a unit plagued by low numbers when coach Jim McElwain arrived. Cleveland is one of five wide receivers in the 2016 class. UF also added two quality running backs — Mark Thompson, the nation's top junior college running back, and Alabama high school star Lamical Perine.

Kicker Eddy Pineiro, a former Alabama commitment, is expected to solve the Gators' long-standing kicking woes, even though he never has played in a game.

But Florida's failure to sign a defensive tackle and cover corner is a reminder of how well Will Muschamp recruited the defensive side of the football. The Gators also signed just four top-50 in-state players, while Miami picked up 10 and FSU eight.

"We've still got a long ways to go, but we'll continue to work that in all those areas," McElwain says. "I kind of like how we've got something from a lot of the areas as far as within the state and not just focused on one central area.

"That's something we still need to get better at, and we'll keep working at it."

SPOTLIGHT ON

TYRIE CLEVELAND

WR • HOUSTON, TX

Tyrie Cleveland was born and raised in Jacksonville and grew up a Florida Gators fan. But he later moved to Houston to live with his aunt and seemed poised to remain closer to home when National Signing Day arrived.

But at the moment of truth, Cleveland had a change of heart, even as his aunt, Theresa Yancy, shed tears in the football coach's office prior to her nephew's signing ceremony. The No. 2 wide receiver in the 2016 class, Cleveland had committed to Houston but flipped his commitment to the Gators, also shunning TCU and Arkansas along the way.

Yancy had hoped Cleveland would chose Arkansas. Razorbacks coach Bret Bielema did, too, and soon fired a veiled shot on the SEC Network at McElwain's recruiting practices.

Bielema called UF the "new Ole Miss." (The Rebels are in the midst of an NCAA investigation.)

"They're doing some things in recruiting that kind of shock you a little bit," Bielema said of the Gators.

McElwain responded, "Obviously this guy doesn't know who the heck I am."

McElwain is well aware of the impact Cleveland could make for an offense that ranked 12th in the SEC. The 6'2", 194-pound speedster is a game-changer. Cleveland averaged 21.3 yards and scored 14 touchdowns on 46 receptions in 2015.

"It's a little bit of a homecoming," McElwain says. "Here's a guy who grew up wanting to be a Gator, playing in The Swamp. I'm really happy he's back in this part of the country."

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
McArthur Burnett	DB	5-9/157	Pahokee, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	482
Antonneous Clayton	DE	6-3/235	Vienna, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	26
Tyrie Cleveland	WR	6-2/194	Houston, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	33
Stone Forsythe	OT	6-7/309	Winter Garden, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	986
Feleipe Franks	QB	6-6/214	Crawfordville, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	54
Chauncey Gardner	DB	5-11/197	Cocoa, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	45
Josh Hammond	WR	6-1/179	Hallandale Beach, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	163
Brett Heggie	C	6-3/314	Mount Dora, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	548
Vosean Joseph	OLB	6-1/215	Miami, FL	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	641
Quincy Lenton	S	5-11/207	Meridian, MS	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	591
Dre Massey	WR	5-9/184	Greenville, SC	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	26*
C.J. McWilliams	CB	5-11/163	Miami, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,367
Jeremiah Moon	OLB	6-4/209	Hoover, AL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	304
Lamical Perine	RB	5-11/218	Theodore, AL	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	496
Eddy Pineiro	K	6-0/178	Miami, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	154*
Jachai Polite	DE	6-2/259	Daytona Beach, FL	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	747
Joseph Putu	CB	6-2/195	Providence, RI	★★★	NR	★★	★★★	127*
David Reese	LB	6-0/240	Farmington, MI	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	407
Jordan Smith	DE	6-5/225	Lithonia, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	338
Freddie Swain	WR	6-0/177	Ocala, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	126
Jawaan Taylor	OG	6-5/347	Cocoa, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	951
Jeawon Taylor	S	6-0/191	Montgomery, AL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	353
Mark Thompson	RB	6-2/228	La Mott, PA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	5*
Kyle Trask	QB	6-4/230	Manvel, TX	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	2,137
Rick Wells	WR	6-0/200	Jacksonville, FL	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	458

*junior college transfer

GEORGIA BULLDOGS

National Forecast: **17** /// *SEC East Prediction:* **2**

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	3	vs. North Carolina #
Sept.	10	Nicholls State
Sept.	17	at Missouri
Sept.	24	at Ole Miss
Oct.	1	Tennessee
Oct.	8	at South Carolina
Oct.	15	Vanderbilt
Oct.	29	vs. Florida %
Nov.	5	at Kentucky
Nov.	12	Auburn
Nov.	19	UL Lafayette
Nov.	26	Georgia Tech

#Atlanta, GA %Jacksonville, FL

Georgia's administration pulled the plug on the Mark Richt era after 15 pretty good years because they finally decided he couldn't win a national championship, and they were tired of looking bad in big games.

But they were also worried that Kirby Smart, the longtime choice of many, would get away last offseason. The decision to fire Richt, in reality, was as much about hiring Smart, the Georgia alum and longtime Alabama defensive coordinator, as it was about letting Richt go.

And so the Smart era begins with high expectations. He walks in with four national championship rings, and with the knowledge that failing to win one in Athens — or at least getting to a title game — will make the coaching change a wash at best.

Yes, just a bit of pressure.

But the good news for Smart is that he inherits a good amount of talent. There may not be enough experience for the Bulldogs to make a championship run right away. But there should be enough for a solid debut season.

ISAIAH MCKENZIE

QUARTERBACKS Jacob Eason was brought to Georgia to bring star power back to the quarterback position, and based on how he looked in the spring, eventually he will. But there's no guarantee that it will happen right away. Last year's starter, Greyson Lambert, is still around. So is Brice Ramsey, who entered last year as the favorite to start. Eason and Ramsey have strong arms, but Lambert, whose arm isn't that weak either, has good command of the huddle and 21 career starts to lean on. Lambert got a lot of grief last year, and sometimes it was warranted, but he also threw only two interceptions all season, and he had one of the best individual passing games in program history against South Carolina. That was all after joining the team a few weeks before preseason practice. Still, Eason brings a ton of talent, so Smart and Jim Chaney (the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach) have a clear decision to make on how to roll at the most important position in the opener against a quality team: Experience, with Lambert or Ramsey, or get the future started right away.

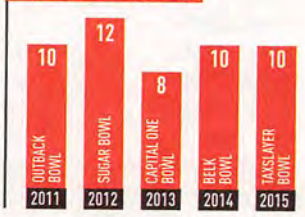
RUNNING BACKS While all the attention will be paid to how quickly Nick Chubb returns to the field, don't overlook Sony Michel, who surpassed 1,000 rushing yards last year — despite not starting until Chubb was hurt, in the sixth game of the season. So Chubb's health will determine whether Georgia will have a two-headed monster, or just one. Chubb's importance was on display last year, as the running game suffered without him as Michel was forced to take on almost all of the load. This year Georgia also has four-star recruit Elijah Holyfield — yes, the son of Evander — and veteran Brendan Douglas. But obviously all eyes will be on Chubb. It's not so much how soon he sees the field, but how soon he gets a lot of carries, and how close he is to his previous self. Smart has promised to bring him along at a pace that's good for Chubb's future, meaning he won't be rushed onto the field. Michel's presence should help that. But it's hard to see Georgia's offense being outstanding without a healthy Chubb, even if it takes a few games for that to happen.

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 9-3, 5-3 SEC

It's a new era in Athens as Kirby Smart replaces Mark Richt after 15 years on the Georgia sideline. While Richt had a successful tenure, a fresh start under Smart could provide a short-term boost for a program that has national title aspirations. Georgia's defense, which allowed only 16.9 points per game last season, should remain strong despite the loss of some key players. Bigger question marks surround the offense. The Bulldogs have to settle on a starting quarterback, and running back Nick Chubb is recovering from a serious knee injury. If Smart makes a smooth transition to his new role as a program CEO and a quarterback seizes the job, the Bulldogs could challenge Tennessee in the SEC East. **Postseason: Outback Bowl vs. Iowa**

5-YEAR WIN TREND



Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS There was a sense among the administration that Georgia's program wasn't detailed enough under Mark Richt, which led to some of the mistakes that snowballed in big losses. That's why many clamored for Kirby Smart, who learned under the notoriously detail-oriented Nick Saban. There was plenty of evidence of the Saban way during spring, with Smart very hands-on at practice, often jumping in to direct drills himself. He's also been involved with the offense, both in meetings and at practice. Could that spread a head coach too thin? Perhaps, but UGA's administration also gave Smart money to hire more quality-control staffers.

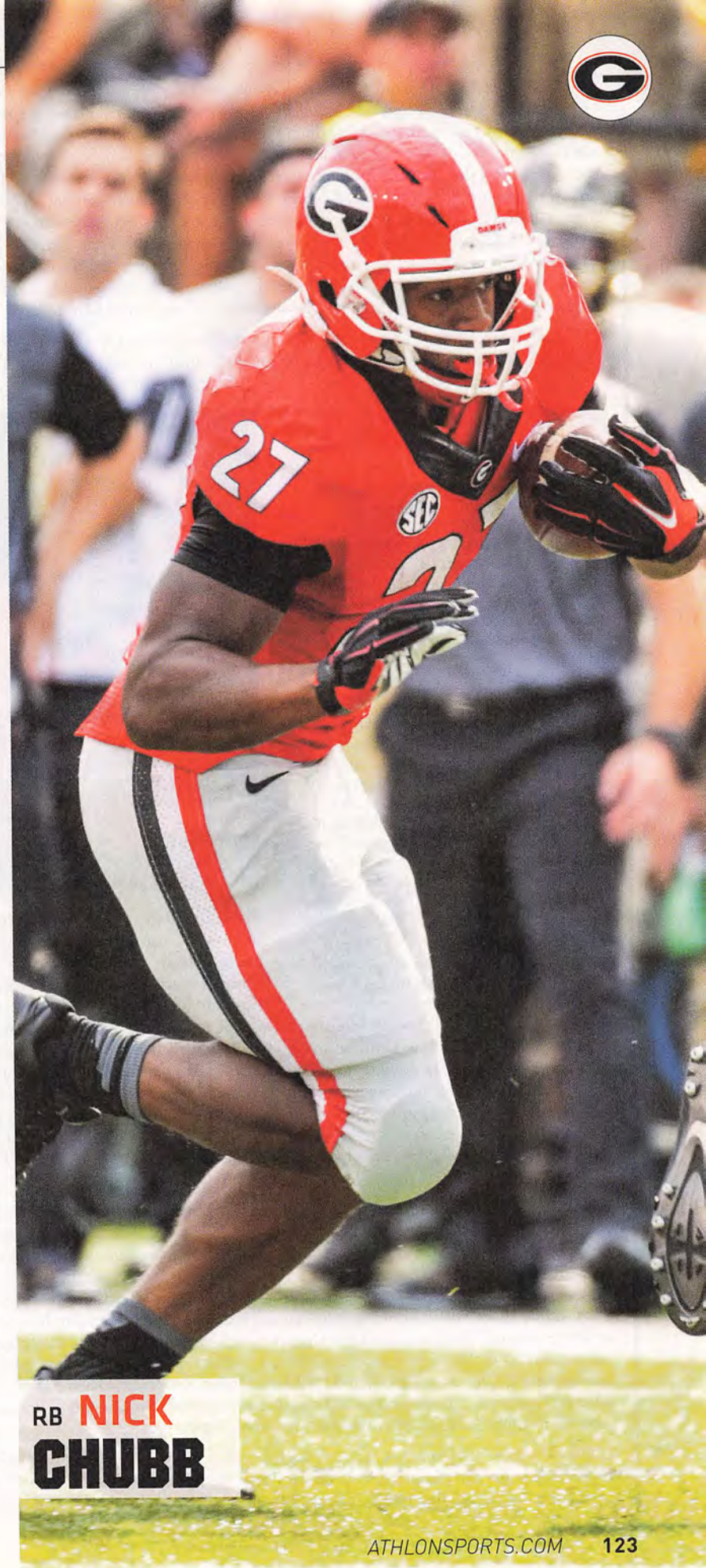
SABANIZATION Many critics also saw a need for a culture change around Georgia's program, and Smart is bringing that. He may not be as liable to jump on a reporter as Saban, but Smart did limit player interviews and kept his assistants off-limits. He personally ended what had been a UGA athletics department policy of allowing transfers a release to attend any school. It's not that Richt ran a loose ship. It was actually the opposite when it came to player discipline. But many wondered if Georgia needed to become more cut-throat to compete with the Alabamas of the world.

BEAMER BALL A notable change for Georgia is having a special teams coordinator, after Richt divided those duties up among his assistants. And Georgia went for a big (last) name in special teams, hiring Shane Beamer. Smart explained that he wanted one person overseeing special teams because "he can put the whole plan together, and you're not having to interact with two or three people to do that."

SOPHOMORE SLUMP Linebacker Lorenzo Carter may have the most potential of any defensive player, but the question is his drive and consistency. It was why he was passed on the depth chart last year by Davin Bellamy. At one point in the spring, Smart said the coaches "tried to challenge him to be physical." Carter looked great as a freshman, racking up 4.5 sacks and 18 QB pressures mostly off the bench. But he regressed last yearand recorded zero sacks.

IT'S ABOUT TIME Georgia is finally getting an indoor facility, the last team in the SEC to do so. But construction on it means that Smart's entire first year will see the team bussing about seven minutes to makeshift practice fields on the outskirts of campus. It still ended up being a nice set-up: The school spent about $1 million to secure and retro-fit the fields, adding all the amenities needed, including video stands and temporary trailers.

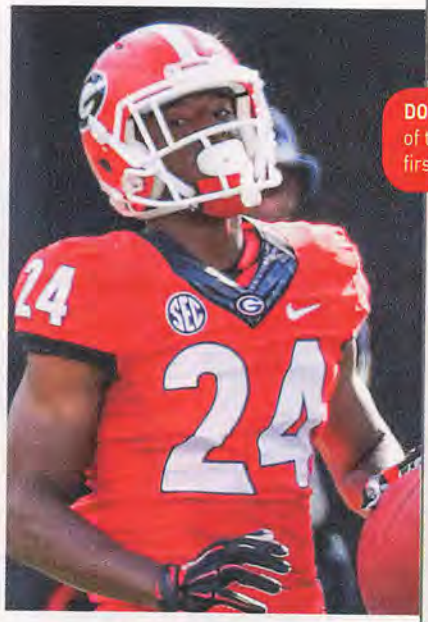
TIGHT END TALK One of the most confounding problems with Georgia's offense last year was not getting the ball to the tight ends, one of the deepest positions on the team. The tight ends accounted for only 14 percent of Georgia's receptions (28 out of 199), 13 percent of the receiving yards (306 out of 2,406), and just one TD catch. Look for all that to change under offensive coordinator Jim Chaney, whose ability to get the tight ends involved has been repeatedly invoked by Smart as one reason he hired him.



RB NICK CHUBB

RECEIVERS Malcolm Mitchell is gone, but sophomore Terry Godwin ably steps into the featured role. The 5'11" Godwin offers a great blend of speed and hands and could come close to doubling his 35 catches and 379 yards as a freshman. The question is who else will emerge. Isaiah McKenzie is lightning quick but is more suited to a slot role. The Bulldogs need bigger possession receivers, and while they do have some on hand (Michael Chigbu, Shaquery Wilson, Shakenneth Williams), they're unproven. Meanwhile, tight end is once again a talented spot, with starter Jeb Blazevich and reserve Jackson Harris joined by five-star recruit Isaac Nauta as well as Charlie Woerner, a hybrid receiver-tight end. Chaney is renowned for his use of the tight end, and last year's offense failed to get the ball to playmakers — like Godwin and McKenzie — in space. That figures to be something Chaney tries hard to fix.

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN In a season of disappointments, Georgia's offensive line may have been the biggest last year. There's reason to be optimistic: New line coach Sam Pittman brings a long track record of success to Athens, and his part of the package deal with Chaney was a big reason Smart hired them. There's also reason to be concerned: Longtime tackle starters John Theus and Kolton Houston have to be replaced. Greg Pyke, a starter the past two years at guard, was moved to one tackle spot in the spring. But Smart and Pittman were desperate enough to recruit a fifth-year transfer from Rhode Island, Tyler Catalina. The interior line will at least be experienced, anchored by center Brandon Kublanow, starting for a second straight year at that spot, along with junior guard Isaiah Wynn. But there isn't as much size on the line as Smart and Pittman want. How well will Pittman make do with what he has in Year 1?



DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)				
WR	5	**Terry Godwin (So.)**	82	Michael Chigbu (So.)
WR	16	Isaiah McKenzie (Jr.)	**81**	**Reggie Davis (Sr.)**
LT	65	Kendall Baker (So.)		Tyler Catalina (Sr.)
LG	77	**Isaiah Wynn (Jr.)**	74	Ben Cleveland (Fr.)
C	54	**Brandon Kublanow (Sr.)**	53	Lamont Gaillard (So.)
RG	55	Dyshon Sims (Jr.)	67	Sam Madden (Fr.)
RT	73	**Greg Pyke (Sr.)**	58	Pat Allen (Fr.)
TE	83	**Jeb Blazevich (Jr.)**	88	Jackson Harris (So.)
QB	11	**Greyson Lambert (Sr.)**	10	Jacob Eason (Fr.)
TB	27	**Nick Chubb (Jr.)**	1	Sony Michel (Jr.)
FB	46	Glenn Welch (Jr.)	47	Christian Payne (Jr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	94	Michael Barnett (So.)		David Marshall (Fr.)
DT	78	Trent Thompson (So.)	97	John Atkins (Jr.)
DE	13	Jonathan Ledbetter (So.)		Michail Carter (Fr.)
OLB	17	Davin Bellamy (Jr.)	41	Chuks Amaechi (Sr.)
ILB	45	Reggie Carter (Jr.)	3	Roquan Smith (So.)
ILB	6	Natrez Patrick (So.)	**42**	**Tim Kimbrough (Sr.)**
OLB	7	Lorenzo Carter (Jr.)	15	D'Andre Walker (So.)
CB	14	**Malkom Parrish (Jr.)**		Mecole Hardman (Fr.)
CB	35	**Aaron Davis (Jr.)**	36	Rico McGraw (So.)
S	24	**Dominick Sanders (Jr.)**	19	Jarvis Wilson (So.)
S	20	**Quincy Mauger (Sr.)**	9	Reggie Wilkerson (Jr.)
SPECIAL TEAMS				
K	98	Rodrigo Blankenship (Fr.)	KR	81 Reggie Davis (Sr.)
P		Marshall Long (Fr.)	PR	16 Isaiah McKenzie (Jr.)

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN Tracy Rocker was one of two assistants retained by Smart, and given the recruiting on the defensive line, that's no surprise. The production hasn't quite equaled the talent, but Trent Thompson could very well change that. Considered by some the nation's best overall recruit last year, Thompson came along slowly last fall; but he ended up starting six games and is a candidate for a breakout season. John Atkins, a junior, also offers size and skill at nose tackle. But after those two there are a lot of questions, with last year's team having lost four senior defensive linemen, all of whom played. The good news for Rocker is he's recruited very well lately, and he has a talented group of sophomores (Michael Barnett, DaQuan Hawkins, Jonathan Ledbetter and Chauncey Rivers) and freshmen (Julian Rochester, David Marshall and Michail Carter). If Thompson and Atkins can become stars, and enough of the youngsters fill in well, Georgia's defensive line should be pretty stout.

LINEBACKERS Georgia lost more at the linebacker position than at any other spot on the roster. Jordan Jenkins and Leonard Floyd started each of the past three years at outside linebacker, disrupting offenses for most of that time. At inside linebacker,

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH
Kirby Smart
RECORD AT SCHOOL
First Season
CAREER RECORD
First Season
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Jim Chaney
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Mel Tucker
LOCATION
Athens, GA
STADIUM
Sanford Stadium (92,746)

KEY BULLDOGS

DOMINICK SANDERS, S The unquestioned leader of the secondary, Sanders made the AP All-SEC first team last year and led the team with six INTs.

TERRY GODWIN, WR Georgia's second-leading receiver last year, with 35 catches for 379 yards; also rushed seven times, and had a 44-yard touchdown pass in the bowl game.

NICK CHUBB, RB He will enter the season ninth on Georgia's all-time rushing list despite missing basically the final eight games of last year.

SONY MICHEL, RB Despite starting only six games, all after Chubb's injury, Michel ran for 1,161 yards, and also chipped in 270 receiving yards.

ISAIAH MCKENZIE, WR/KR Has already tied school records with four career punt return TDs and five career return touchdowns overall.

KEY LOSSES

MALCOLM MITCHELL, WR Georgia's leader in every receiving category last year (58 catches, 865 yards, five TDs) and the most dynamic player on last year's offense once Chubb went down.

JORDAN JENKINS, OLB While he had a career-low four sacks as a senior, he did have 10.5 tackles for a loss.

LEONARD FLOYD, OLB Not as many sacks as expected, but second on the team in tackles, tied for the lead in TFLs, and the leader in QB pressures.

JAKE GANUS, ILB Named the MVP of the entire team after his only season at Georgia, when he led the Bulldogs in tackles with 102.

MARSHALL MORGAN, K Morgan left campus third all-time in points, and his departure leaves an uncertain kicking situation.

RISING STAR

A speedy and dynamic talent, true freshman **Mecole Hardman** (5'11", 180) could be a two-way player: He figures to mostly play cornerback but will be used some on offense. That could include the Wildcat, as he played quarterback in high school. He could also return punts and kicks.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 GEORGIA ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
10 Eason, Jacob	6-5/211	Fr.	Lake Stevens, WA
11 Lambert, Greyson	6-5/220	Sr.	Jesup, GA
12 Ramsey, Brice	6-3/213	Jr.	Kingsland, GA
17 Robinson, Nick	6-1/200	Fr.	R. Santa Margarita, CA
2 Vaughn, Sam	6-3/189	So.	Fort Pierce, FL

RUNNING BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
27 Chubb, Nick	5-10/220	Jr.	Cedartown, GA
30 Crowder, Tae	6-3/220	Fr.	Hamilton, GA
22 Douglas, Brendan	5-11/215	Sr.	Augusta, GA
49 Fortin, Turner	6-1/230	Fr.	Johns Creek, GA
47 LeStrange, Kyle	6-0/233	Sr.	Milton, GA
1 Michel, Sony	5-11/212	Jr.	Plantation, FL
43 Moore, Nick	6-3/245	So.	Snellville, GA
47 Payne, Christian	6-1/232	Jr.	Athens, GA
35 Turman, A.J.	6-0/204	Jr.	Orlando, FL
46 Welch, Glenn	6-3/244	Jr.	Jesup, GA

RECEIVERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
82 Chigbu, Michael	6-2/216	So.	New Orleans, LA
81 Davis, Reggie	6-0/170	Sr.	Tallahassee, FL
5 Godwin, Terry	5-11/174	So.	Hogansville, GA
80 Hegedus, Charlie	6-2/202	Sr.	Marietta, GA
16 McKenzie, Isaiah	5-8/170	Jr.	Miami, FL
84 Payne, Wyatt	6-1/175	Fr.	Dublin, GA
29 Price, Matt	6-0/197	So.	Snellville, GA
Ridley, Riley	6-2/195	Fr.	Coconut Creek, FL
2 Stanley, Jayson	6-2/204	So.	Fairburn, GA
86 Towns, Kenneth	6-3/202	Sr.	Albany, GA
25 Van Tiflin, Steven	6-1/201	So.	Saginaw, MI
23 Williams, Shakenneth	6-1/199	Jr.	Macon, GA
14 Wilson, Shaquery	6-1/200	So.	Coral Gables, FL

TIGHT ENDS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
83 Blazevich, Jeb	6-5/248	Jr.	Charlotte, NC
41 Bynum, Aulden	6-5/268	Jr.	Valdosta, GA
85 Davis, Jordan	6-4/235	Jr.	Thomson, GA
88 Harris, Jackson	6-6/247	So.	Columbia, TN
Nauta, Isaac	6-4/237	Fr.	Buford, GA

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
58 Allen, Pat	6-4/297	Fr.	Reisterstown, MD
65 Baker, Kendall	6-6/310	So.	Atlanta, GA
Catalina, Tyler	6-6/290	Sr.	Holden, MA
74 Cleveland, Ben	6-6/345	Fr.	Toccoa, GA
64 Edwards, Jake	6-4/284	So.	Franklin, GA
57 Essex, Alex	6-5/276	So.	Richmond, VA
53 Gaillard, Lamont	6-2/298	So.	Fayetteville, NC
76 Hall, Carson	6-5/295	Sr.	Dallas, GA
63 Hardin, Sage	6-6/281	Fr.	Atlanta, GA
60 Jurkovic, Mirko	6-5/275	Fr.	South Bend, IN
54 Kublanow, Brandon	6-3/282	Sr.	Marietta, GA
67 Madden, Sam	6-6/346	Fr.	Barnegat, NJ
73 Pyke, Greg	6-6/313	Sr.	Baltimore, MD
56 Seward, Billy	6-3/260	Jr.	Watkinsville, GA
55 Sims, Dyshon	6-4/293	Jr.	Valdosta, GA
74 Swilley, Thomas	6-3/295	Jr.	Athens, GA
77 Wynn, Isaiah	6-2/278	Jr.	St. Petersburg, FL

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
97 Atkins, John	6-4/300	Jr.	Thomson, GA
94 Barnett, Michael	6-4/276	So.	Dorchester, SC
11 Brown, Keyon	6-3/249	So.	Wauchula, FL
96 Hawkins, DaQuan	6-4/302	So.	Atlanta, GA
13 Ledbetter, Jonathan	6-4/251	So.	Tucker, GA
88 Ledbetter, Joseph	6-4/240	Jr.	Tucker, GA
90 Rivers, Chauncey	6-3/272	So.	Stone Mountain, GA
Rochester, Julian	6-5/327	Fr.	Powder Springs, GA
78 Thompson, Trenton	6-4/307	So.	Albany, GA
92 Young, Justin	6-4/265	Fr.	Loganville, GA

LINEBACKERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
41 Amaechi, Chuks	6-3/230	Sr.	Avondale, AZ
17 Bellamy, Davin	6-5/241	Jr.	Chamblee, GA
7 Carter, Lorenzo	6-6/242	Jr.	Norcross, GA
45 Carter, Reggie	6-1/228	Jr.	Snellville, GA
42 Kimbrough, Tim	6-0/226	Sr.	Indianapolis, IN
43 Long, Tommy	6-2/231	Sr.	Marietta, GA
8 McGee, Shaun	6-3/232	Jr.	Snellville, GA
50 O'Neal, Johnny	6-2/231	Sr.	Dublin, GA
6 Patrick, Natrez	6-3/248	So.	Atlanta, GA
38 Rankin, Ryne	6-1/218	Sr.	Orlando, FL
3 Smith, Roquan	6-1/217	So.	Montezuma, GA
44 Taylor, Juwan	6-1/199	So.	Hollywood, FL
32 Underwood, Ridge	6-2/231	Sr.	Moultrie, GA
15 Walker, D'Andre	6-3/224	So.	Fairburn, GA

DEFENSIVE BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
18 Baker, Deandre	5-11/174	So.	Miami, FL
12 Briscoe, Juwuan	5-11/193	So.	Waldorf, MD
33 Choates, Kirby	6-0/198	So.	East Point, GA
Clay, Chad	6-0/180	Fr.	Marietta, GA
35 Davis, Aaron	6-1/190	Jr.	Locust Grove, GA
26 Enadeghe, Otamere	5-11/160	Fr.	Atlanta, GA
31 Fenteng, Shattle	6-2/185	Sr.	Loganville, GA
23 Guinn, Jonah	6-0/191	Sr.	Walnut Grove, GA
29 Hill, Tim	5-11/170	Sr.	Atlanta, GA
20 Mauger, Quincy	6-0/200	Sr.	Marietta, GA
36 McGraw, Rico	6-0/192	So.	Nashville, TN
22 McNeely, Avery	5-8/180	Jr.	Athens, GA
14 Parrish, Malkom	5-10/188	Jr.	Quitman, GA
39 Roundtree, Rashad	6-1/205	So.	Evans, GA
24 Sanders, Dominick	6-0/189	Jr.	Tucker, GA
9 Wilkerson, Reggie	5-11/176	Jr.	Citra, FL
19 Wilson, Jarvis	6-2/190	So.	Tupelo, MS

SPECIALISTS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
98 Blankenship, Rodrigo (K)	6-1/185	Fr.	Marietta, GA
56 Courson, John (LS)	5-11/190	So.	Athens, GA
97 Cowart, Will (P)	6-3/164	So.	Warner Robins, GA
69 Frix, Trent (LS)	6-0/211	Sr.	Calhoun, GA
59 Herzwurm, Matthew (LS)	6-0/233	Jr.	Augusta, GA
94 Pritchard, Thomas (K)	5-10/163	Sr.	Louisville, GA
95 Reynolds, Hudson (LS)	6-4/215	Fr.	Bainbridge, GA
90 Stumpe, Tanner (P)	5-8/166	So.	Albany, GA

Scouting the BULLDOGS

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP GEORGIA

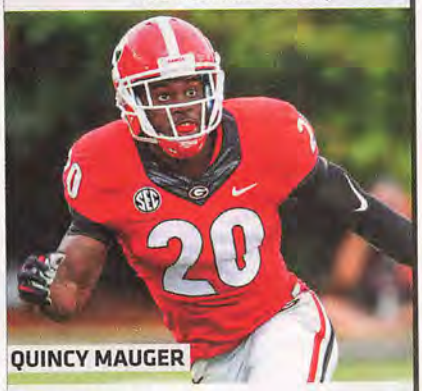
"I think the new staff has to count on the freshman [Jacob Eason] coming in to be the guy at quarterback because they don't feel like they have anyone else on the roster to do what he does. I think he's a can't-miss prospect, but that's a tough deal as a coach when you've got no choice but to put a true freshman out there. There's going to be some inherent issues with that. ... They're happy with their top two running backs, but I think they're really worried about the depth offensively and the number of playmakers they inherited. It's not like what it was in the past at Georgia. Obviously they need Nick Chubb to come back and be the same player he was, but who knows how he'll respond after a pretty horrific injury. ... They're pretty solid at the No. 1s, but when you dig down the depth chart they don't have the No. 2s or 3s like Kirby Smart and those guys are used to having at Alabama. The recruiting kind of fell off the last few years under Mark Richt. ... On defense, Kirby isn't walking into the same kind of talent he worked with at Alabama. Just one example: They don't have a linebacker corps; I mean, they just simply don't have any good linebackers. They're player deficient right now. I think they'll probably have some headaches early but Kirby will get it done. He's really, really, really good, and bringing Mel Tucker with him was huge. Those guys can coach. ... Jim Chaney is as good as anybody. They have a legitimate staff, so Georgia just needs to give those guys a little time."

2015 RESULTS

RECORD: 10-3, 5-3 (SEC)

Sept.	5	UL Monroe	W	51-14
Sept.	12	at Vanderbilt	W	31-14
Sept.	19	South Carolina	W	52-20
Sept.	26	Southern	W	48-6
Oct.	3	Alabama	L	10-38
Oct.	10	at Tennessee	L	31-38
Oct.	17	Missouri	W	9-6
Oct.	31	vs. Florida %	L	3-27
Nov.	7	Kentucky	W	27-3
Nov.	14	at Auburn	W	20-13
Nov.	21	Georgia Southern (ot)	W	23-17
Nov.	28	at Georgia Tech	W	13-7
Jan.	2	vs. Penn State #	W	24-17

%Jacksonville #Taxslayer Bowl



QUINCY MAUGER

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Greyson Lambert	**256**	**162**	**1,959**	**12**	**2**
Brice Ramsey	**35**	**21**	**249**	**1**	**2**

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Sony Michel	**219**	**1,161**	**5.3**	**8**
Nick Chubb	**92**	**747**	**8.1**	**7**
Keith Marshall	68	350	5.1	3
Brendan Douglas	36	140	3.9	0

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Malcolm Mitchell	58	865	14.9	5
Terry Godwin	**35**	**379**	**10.8**	**2**
Sony Michel	**26**	**270**	**10.4**	**3**
Jeb Blazevich	**15**	**144**	**9.6**	**1**

KICKING: Morgan Marshall, 18-25 FGs, 38-38 XPs, 92 points

TACKLES: Jake Ganus, 102; Leonard Floyd, 74

SACKS: Leonard Floyd, 4.5

INTERCEPTIONS: **Dominick Sanders, 6**

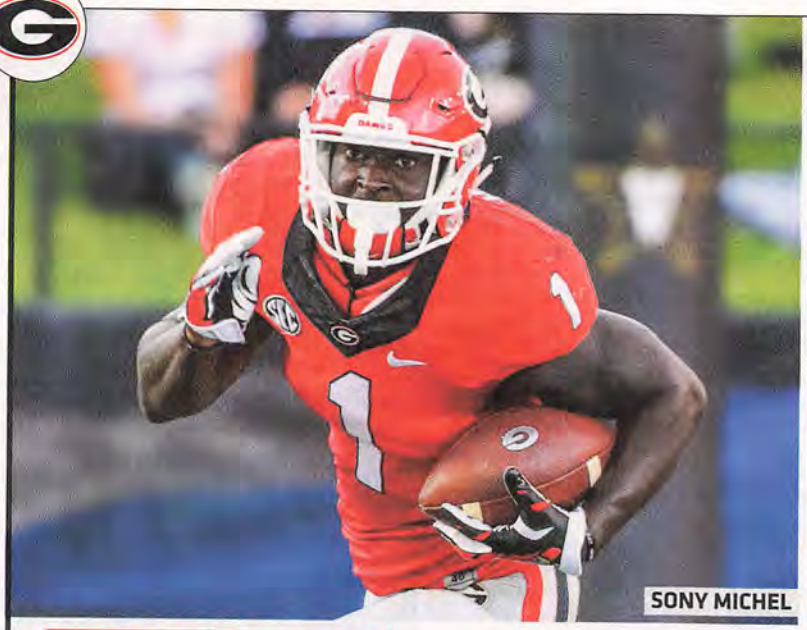
Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	26.3 ppg	9	85
Rushing	192.2 ypg	6	38
Passing	185.1 ypg	10	104
Total	377.2 ypg	8	83

DEFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	16.9 ppg	3	8
Rushing	149.5 ypg	8	42
Passing	156.5 ypg	1	1
Total	305.9 ypg	3	7

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
+4	+0.31	7	39



SONY MICHEL

Jake Ganus was named the team's MVP in his one year on campus. That's a lot to replace, but once again good recruiting should help fill the gaps. While many will look to junior outside linebacker Lorenzo Carter, a former five-star recruit, it's fellow junior Davin Bellamy who drew raves from current and former teammates — including Floyd, who said Bellamy "could be better than me." Inside linebacker Reggie Carter missed virtually all last season with shoulder problems, but he's back now, and could be a lot like Ganus: smart and a nose for the football. Natrez Patrick, a sophomore, started in the TaxSlayer Bowl and had a good spring practice. The fact that Roquan Smith, a top-50 national recruit last year, might not start this season is another example of the talent Smart inherits on this defense.

DEFENSIVE BACKS On paper, Georgia has the best secondary in the country: Nearly every starter returns from a unit that finished first in the nation in pass defense last year. The back end is experienced and skilled with junior Dominick Sanders and senior Quincy Mauger. The cornerbacks, led by junior Malkom Parrish, are extremely talented. But a closer inspection of the stats reveals that the Bulldogs benefited from playing two triple-option teams that hardly passed. And Smart, after watching film, opined that the previous coaching staff "protected" the young secondary in 2015 by liberally blitzing to force quick throws. And it is true that when the opposing quarterback had time, Georgia's secondary was picked apart. Still, there's a lot of talent and experience in this secondary, which shouldn't experience a coaching drop-off from Jeremy Pruitt to Mel Tucker. So while maybe it wasn't really the best secondary in the nation last year, there are the elements to make it really good in 2016.

SPECIALISTS McKenzie (five career punt or kickoff return touchdowns) could be the best returner in the SEC and an All-America candidate. The only question is whether he stays healthy after having battled hamstring problems. The kicking spots are "scary," to use Smart's term before spring practice. Marshall Long was signed to become the punter, so he's likely to serve in that capacity, although Ramsey did well in that role last year. The placekicking job will go to a walk-on, likely either Rodriguo Blankenship or William Ham. Whoever wins the job will attempt his first college kick against North Carolina in the Georgia Dome.

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	32.5	20
DEFENSE	28.0	35
MARGIN	+4.5	22
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	42.3%	62
DEFENSE	32.3%	3
MARGIN	+10.0%	11
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	6.0	40
DEFENSE	4.8	13
MARGIN	+1.2	17
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	3.9	109
DEFENSE	3.4	9
MARGIN	+0.5	39
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	-3.3	88
ACTUAL	4	37
MARGIN	+7.3	14

NUMBERS TO KNOW

KEY: **1**-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

19.6 Nick Chubb's injury was devastating to Georgia's offense. Five games into 2015, the Dawgs were averaging 38.4 points per game and 7.4 yards per play. But over the final eight games, they averaged just 18.8 and 5.2, respectively. That's a stumble of 19.6 points per game and 2.2 yards per play.

62.5 Georgia averaged only 62.5 plays per game in 2015, the fourth-slowest tempo in FBS and the slowest in the SEC. Kirby Smart's new offensive coordinator, Jim Chaney, probably won't try to pick up the pace too much — at Pitt last year, Chaney's offense averaged just 65.5 plays per game (95th).

3.39 Despite the offense's collapse post-Chubb, the Bulldogs still managed to win 10 games because of a stingy defense. They allowed just 3.39 points per scoring opportunity (first downs inside the opponent's 40), ninth in FBS and behind only Vanderbilt (3.33) and Missouri (3.37) in the SEC. Plus, they didn't actually allow that many opportunities; they allowed a success rate of just 32.3 percent, third in the country.

7.3 A little bit of turnover luck doesn't hurt. Based on average fumble recovery rates and the typical ratio of interceptions to passes broken up, Georgia's projected turnover margin was minus-3.3, 88th in FBS. But their actual turnover margin was plus-4 (39th), and the plus-7.3 difference between expected and actual turnovers was the best (or luckiest) in the SEC.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION

Defensive Linemen	3
Linebackers	3
Offensive Linemen	3
Wide Receivers	3
Defensive Backs	2
Tight Ends	2
Athletes	1
Punters	1
Quarterbacks	1
Running Backs	1

BY STATE

Georgia	15
Florida	3
North Carolina	1
Washington	1

There are a lot of historical parallels between the first classes signed by Kirby Smart and Mark Richt. In the long run, that would be good for Smart.

Richt's first class, which came after he didn't join the team full-time until early January, included future stars David Pollack, Thomas Davis, D.J. Shockley and Greg Blue, along with many others who contributed to two SEC championships. Jim Donnan, the previous coach, helped Richt out by recruiting a lot of those players before his firing.

Richt and his staff did the same for Smart, who didn't join full-time until mid-January.

The headliner was Jacob Eason, who had been committed to Georgia for more than a year, then re-committed after Smart's hire. Eason was the No. 5-ranked player in 247Sports' Top 247 Composite and could contend for the Bulldogs' starting quarterback job right away.

Two more five-stars whom Richt had recruited signed after Smart was able to close the deal: tight end Isaac Nauta and athlete Mecole Hardman.

That's not to say Smart and his staff didn't put their own stamp on the class. The most notable case is receiver Riley Ridley, younger brother of Alabama star receiver Calvin Ridley. New Georgia receivers coach James Coley helped secure the younger Ridley after he hadn't even been on Georgia's radar.

The Bulldogs also got Signing Day switches from defensive linemen David Marshall and Michail Carter, and even signed a punter (Marshall Long), which the previous staff hadn't done for this class.

But ultimately what Smart and his staff did best was avoid making the coaching change a recruiting disaster. The result was a consensus top-10 class, strong at the skill positions (tailback Elijah Holyfield was a longtime Georgia commitment) but a bit weak on the offensive line, where only three signed.

Georgia did miss on several key late targets, so it could've been a much better class. But given the coaching change, it also could've been a lot worse.

SPOTLIGHT ON
JACOB EASON
QB • LAKE STEVENS, WA

Jacob Eason has the arm that launched high-profile cross-country flights. Mark Richt flew from Georgia to Washington the day after beating Auburn last year. Kirby Smart made the same trip right after his introductory press conference a month later.

And when Eason landed in Athens in January, that was the backdrop: The expectations that he would, sooner or later, be the next great Georgia quarterback, and perhaps soon enough rescue a moribund passing game.

Eason did his best to downplay that.

"Obviously, as a young kid I'm going to want to live up to it and be the great quarterback and stuff. But that's a longshot," he said. "Yeah, I look at the expectations and they're great and people have high hopes for me. I'm going to do the best I can to fulfill them. But that just means a lot of hard work."

Smart also tried to deflect the expectations: "The pressure's not on Jacob, the pressure's on me." And when spring practice began Eason was running with the third team, the implicit message being that he would still have to earn the job, and do so by beating out two veterans.

Matt Stafford, to whom Eason is often compared, didn't win the starting job right away, and he ended up with more interceptions than touchdowns in his freshman season. So it may not happen right away.

But Stafford himself sees what everyone else does in Eason. After watching him in person this spring, Stafford summed it up: "He's a super-talented kid."

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
Chris Barnes	OT	6-3/294	Leesburg, GA	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	501
Michail Carter	DT	6-3/317	Jackson, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	118
Tyler Clark	DT	6-4/309	Americus, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	253
Chad Clay	CB	6-0/180	Marietta, GA	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	413
Ben Cleveland	OT	6-6/345	Toccoa, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	91
Jacob Eason	QB	6-5/211	Lake Stevens, WA	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	5
Mecole Hardman Jr.	ATH	5-11/180	Bowman, GA	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	13
Elijah Holyfield	RB	5-11/209	College Park, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	165
Solomon Kindley	OT	6-4/370	Jacksonville, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,051
Jaleel Laguins	ILB	6-2/220	Watkinsville, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	235
Marshall Long	P	6-2/223	China Grove, NC	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	1,679
Chauncey Manac	LB	6-3/255	Fargo, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	114
David Marshall	LB	6-3/270	Thomaston, GA	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	477
Tyrique McGhee	CB	5-10/177	Bryon, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	634
Isaac Nauta	TE	6-4/237	Buford, GA	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	12
Riley Ridley	WR	6-2/195	Coconut Creek, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	232
Julian Rochester	DT	6-5/327	Powder Springs, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	68
Tyler Simmons	WR	6-0/194	Powder Springs, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	380
Javon Wims	WR	6-4/220	Miami, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	11*
Charlie Woerner	TE	6-5/249	Tiger, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	133

*junior college transfer

KENTUCKY WILDCATS

National Forecast: **56** /// *SEC East Prediction:* **4**

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	Southern Miss
Sept. 10	at Florida
Sept. 17	New Mexico State
Sept. 24	South Carolina
Oct. 1	at Alabama
Oct. 8	Vanderbilt
Oct. 22	Mississippi State
Oct. 29	at Missouri
Nov. 5	Georgia
Nov. 12	at Tennessee
Nov. 19	Austin Peay
Nov. 26	at Louisville

Mark Stoops knows he needs to reverse the recent narrative of his tenure at Kentucky.

In two consecutive seasons the Wildcats have started strong — 5–1 in 2014 and 4–1 in 2015 — only to finish both seasons at 5–7 and outside bowl eligibility. The 2014 collapse could largely be dismissed based on a schedule back-loaded with many of its most difficult games, but that argument held little weight a year later after losses in winnable games against Auburn, Vanderbilt and Louisville.

"You know that's been our story," Stoops said after one poor practice in the spring. "We've been too much hot and cold, and we need to be consistent. We've harped on that all along."

Hope for improvement in 2016 largely centers on the 2014 recruiting class, the highest-rated class in program history, entering its third season on campus and an offensive overhaul. Former Cincinnati coaches Eddie Gran and Darin Hinshaw aim to bring their video-game-like statistics 85 miles south on I-75, while UK fans cross their fingers that the introduction of a third offensive coordinator in three seasons will not derail any progress made by its young nucleus.

A fourth consecutive season without a bowl berth would likely place Stoops firmly on the hot seat, but a senior class largely made up of Stoops' first signees in Lexington hopes it can take the next step in a rebuilding process the UK head coach has never shied away from.

DREW BARKER

QUARTERBACKS Despite starting 22 games in a row, Patrick Towles never seemed to gain a firm hold on the quarterback job, and he saw the writing on the wall after being benched in favor of Drew Barker with two games remaining in the 2015 season. That decision led Towles to transfer to Boston College, and he was quickly followed out the door by backup Reese Phillips after Stoops called Barker his starter in several postseason media appearances. While UK coaches remain high on Barker's potential, the transfers left Gran and Hinshaw with a serious depth issue upon joining the staff and made securing the commitment of junior college transfer Stephen Johnson among their first priorities in Lexington. The new UK coaches opened competition at every offensive position — including quarterback — in the spring, but Barker remains the odds-on favorite to start the season opener. Barker completed just 50 percent (35-of-70) of his passes for 364 yards, one touchdown and two interceptions in his debut season, but in the spring he appeared to begin to cash in on some of the potential that had him ranked as a four-star recruit out of high school. His arm has never been the question, but decision-making has been an issue at times. Even if Barker thrives as the starter, Johnson could serve a role as a dual-threat option, capable of adding another dimension to the offense with his speed.

RUNNING BACKS Kentucky returns all four scholarship running backs from a group that averaged 5.9 yards per carry in 2015. Junior Stanley "Boom" Williams leads the way after ranking eighth in the SEC in rushing yards per game and leading UK in rushing in each of the last two seasons. But he was held out of contact drills in the spring following offseason elbow surgery to

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 6-6, 3-5 SEC

Mark Stoops enters his fourth season searching for a breakthrough campaign. The Wildcats are making progress, but this program is just 4–12 in league play over the last two years. New offensive coordinator Eddie Gran is tasked with developing quarterback Drew Barker and jumpstarting an attack that averaged only 17.5 points in SEC games last year. Barker is supported by four returning starters up front, a solid group of receivers and dynamic running back Boom Williams. The defense — with only four returning starters — is Stoops' biggest concern. The schedule — with home games against Mississippi State, Vanderbilt and South Carolina — should help Kentucky reach its first bowl since 2010.

Postseason: Birmingham Bowl vs. UConn

5-YEAR WIN TREND

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

STAFF TURNOVER After losing just three assistants in his first two years at Kentucky, Mark Stoops had to hire five new full-time assistants and three quality control coaches during the offseason. Two of the departures — offensive coordinator Shannon Dawson and wide receivers coach Tommy Mainord — were Stoops' decision. The others — running backs coach Chad Scott, defensive backs coach Derrick Ansley and special teams coordinator/outside linebackers coach Andy Buh — left Lexington for other jobs. Stoops raided Tommy Tuberville's Cincinnati staff for three of his hires — offensive coordinator Eddie Gran, quarterbacks coach Darin Hinshaw and defensive backs coach Steve Clinkscale — and made the rare move of luring a coach from archrival Louisville when he hired Lamar Thomas to be the new wide receivers coach.

DISCIPLINARIAN APPROACH Gran and Hinshaw wasted no time in outlining the high standard to which they expect to hold players at UK, spending much of their introductory news conference talking about the discipline they expect on and off the field. Both coaches made good on that promise in spring practice with players reporting an initial adjustment to the old-school approach. "It's definitely a difference, but that's something we need," junior wide receiver Garrett Johnson says.

STAFF DEPTH IMPROVING TOO Stoops received an additional investment in his staff this offseason with the creation of three quality control positions to help his coordinators. Many of the Power 5 conference staffs around the country already featured similar positions, and Stoops was eager to match that advantage. Former Kansas wide receivers coach Tommy Mangino (offense), former Eastern Kentucky safeties coach Brian Landis (defense) and former Kansas special teams coordinator Louie Matsakis (special teams) each bring extensive experience to the staff in the positions that primarily fill behind-the-scenes roles.

FACILITIES UPGRADE Kentucky unveiled its $120 million Commonwealth Stadium renovation last fall, but the scheduled opening of a new $45 million practice facility this summer could ultimately have an even bigger impact on the on-field product. "Building a facility, it's not immediate," Stoops says. "We'll see the fruits of that as we move forward here for the next 50 years of the things we just are doing right now, the structural things we're doing. You're going to see the fruits of that for 50 years as we move this program forward."

FOLK HERO One of UK's three 2016 U.S. Army All-Americans, four-star linebacker Kash Daniel did not have the same volume of high-profile offers as classmates Drake Jackson and Landon Young. But he immediately became a fan favorite after graduating a semester early from tiny Paintsville High School in Eastern Kentucky to enroll for the spring semester. "I've got a lot of eyes watching me," Daniel says. "I guarantee you on Saturday if I get a chance to start, half of Eastern Kentucky is going to be coming up the Mountain Parkway to pack Commonwealth (Stadium)."

RB **BOOM WILLIAMS**

correct an injury that plagued him throughout the second half of the season. With Williams out, senior Jojo Kemp, junior Mikel Horton and sophomore Sihiem King received an extended opportunity to impress the new coaches. Kemp and Horton seem likely to form a three-headed rushing attack with Williams this fall, but King and even 2016 signees Benny Snell and A.J. Rose will be given an opportunity to take a job. Running back remains the deepest position on the UK offense, with Williams being the team's most electric playmaker and Kemp and Horton adding a more power-oriented rushing style.

RECEIVERS The good news for Kentucky's receiving corps is that the Wildcats return every player who caught a pass in 2015 except Towles. The bad news is, that group still was among the most disappointing on the team last season, and struggles at the position ultimately cost wide receivers coach Tommy Mainord his job. Junior wide receivers Dorian Baker, Garrett Johnson, Jeff Badet and Blake Bone have shown flashes of the potential to be significant playmakers, but they all need to improve their consistency. Senior Ryan Timmons described his 2015 season as a "waste," but he was among the spring standouts and will add a valuable weapon to the offense if his improvement carries over to the fall. Sophomore tight end C.J. Conrad might be the best player of the group and appears likely to be used in a variety of situations in the new offense. Whoever plays the majority of the snaps will need to avoid the dropped passes that plagued the group in 2015.

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (9)

WR	13	**Jeff Badet (Jr.)**	6	Blake Bone (Jr.)
WR	2	**Dorian Baker (Jr.)**	11	Tavin Richardson (Fr.)
WR	9	**Garrett Johnson (Jr.)**	1	Ryan Timmons (Sr.)
LT	74	Cole Mosier (Jr.)	75	Tate Leavitt (Jr.)
LG	68	**Nick Haynes (Jr.)**	71	Logan Stenberg (Fr.)
C	72	**Jon Toth (Sr.)**	65	Jervontius Stallings (So.)
RG	69	**Ramsey Meyers (Jr.)**	64	George Asafo-Adjei (So.)
RT	73	**Kyle Meadows (Jr.)**		Landon Young (Fr.)
TE	87	**C.J. Conrad (So.)**	85	Greg Hart (Jr.)
QB	7	Drew Barker (So.)	15	Stephen Johnson (Jr.)
RB	18	**Boom Williams (Jr.)**	3	Jojo Kemp (Sr.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	94	Courtney Miggins (Sr.)	92	Alvonte Bell (Jr.)
NG	69	Matt Elam (Jr.)	77	Naquez Pringle (Jr.)
DT	96	Regie Meant (Jr.)	99	Adrian Middleton (So.)
OLB	35	**Denzil Ware (So.)**	8	Kobie Walker (So.)
MLB	51	Courtney Love (Jr.)	56	Kash Daniel (Fr.)
WLB	34	Jordan Jones (So.)	32	Eli Brown (Fr.)
OLB	41	Josh Allen (So.)	44	De'Niro Laster (Jr.)
CB	21	**Chris Westry (So.)**	11	J.D. Harmon (Sr.)
CB	29	Derrick Baity (So.)	5	Kendall Randolph (Jr.)
SS	27	Mike Edwards (So.)	**24**	**Blake McClain (Sr.)**
FS	15	**Marcus McWilson (Sr.)**	25	Darius West (So.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	99	Austin MacGinnis (Jr.)	KR	10	Sihiem King (So.)
P		Grant McKinniss (Fr.)	PR	1	Ryan Timmons (Sr.)

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN Jordan Swindle, a three-year starter at left tackle, is gone, but All-SEC candidate Jon Toth returns to anchor the UK offensive line at center as a senior. He and a group of four fourth-year juniors — tackles Cole Mosier and Kyle Meadows and guards Nick Haynes and Ramsey Meyers — will need to lead the improvement for a group that ranked 85th nationally in sacks allowed (30) last season. Sophomore George Asafo-Adjei moved from right tackle to guard in the spring and could compete for a starting job, but 2016 signees Tate Leavitt, a junior college transfer, Landon Young and Drake Jackson could also make immediate impacts. Leavitt and Young could be particularly important, with tackle remaining the unit's biggest question mark. Protecting the quarterback in clear passing situations was an issue last season and remained a problem in spring practice.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN Kentucky returns just one full-time starter in its front seven on defense, but the new defensive line starters at least have the benefit of some previous experience in reserve roles. Junior nose guard Matt Elam could still lose some weight from his 6'7", 360-pound frame; but after starting four games in 2015, he will be needed to anchor the group in UK's 3-4 defense and begin to look like the player who was rated as a five-star recruit by 247Sports. Senior end Courtney Miggins and junior tackle Regie Meant should occupy the other two starting spots, but junior end Alvonte Bell could be the best hope in improving the line's pass rush after redshirting in 2015

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH
Mark Stoops

RECORD AT SCHOOL
12-24 (3 years)

CAREER RECORD
12-24 (3 years)

CO-OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS
Eddie Gran, Darrin Hinshaw

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR
D.J. Eliot

LOCATION
Lexington, KY

STADIUM
Commonwealth Stadium (61,000)

KEY WILDCATS

GARRETT JOHNSON, WR Averaged 15.1 yards per catch, showing flashes of the big-play potential that the Cats need.

STANLEY "BOOM" WILLIAMS, RB Ranked eighth in the SEC in rushing yards per game (85.5) as a sophomore and led Kentucky in rushing in each of the last two seasons.

JON TOTH, C Has started each of the last 35 games for Kentucky and is ranked by some as one of the top 10 center prospects for the 2017 NFL Draft.

DREW BARKER, QB Started the final two games of 2015 with mixed results but will look to cash in on the potential that had him as one of the crown jewels of 2014 class.

CHRIS WESTRY, CB Named to the SEC's All-Freshman Team after totaling two interceptions and eight pass breakups while starting all 12 games in his debut season.

KEY LOSSES

JOSH FORREST, LB Finished his UK career with 232 tackles, 16 tackles for a loss, 4.5 sacks and five interceptions.

C.J. JOHNSON, DT Had 67 tackles, eight tackles for a loss, two sacks, one interception, one fumble forced and one fumble recovery for a touchdown in 2015.

JORDAN SWINDLE, LT Three-year starter at left tackle struggled at times as a senior but leaves a massive hole with little experience remaining at the position.

JASON HATCHER, OLB Was dismissed from the team in February, depriving UK of its most experienced pass rusher.

PATRICK TOWLES, QB Lost his two-year hold on the starting job late in the 2015 season and transferred to Boston College but would have provided valuable depth.

RISING STAR

Nebraska transfer **Courtney Love** totaled six tackles in 12 games for the Cornhuskers as a redshirt freshman in 2014, but he will be counted on to immediately anchor the interior of Kentucky's defense this fall. UK coaches have raved about Love's leadership and talent.

AP

2016 KENTUCKY ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
7 Barker, Drew	6-3/218	So.	Burlington, KY
12 Hoak, Gunnar	6-4/190	Fr.	Dublin, OH
15 Johnson, Stephen	6-2/178	Jr.	Rancho Cucamonga, CA
16 Mattingly, Davis	6-4/225	Fr.	Louisville, KY
14 Wright, Luke	6-4/204	So.	Atlanta, GA

RUNNING BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
48 Collins, Will Thomas	5-11/238	Sr.	Jackson, KY
4 Horton, Mikel	6-1/230	Jr.	West Chester, OH
3 Kemp, Jojo	5-10/200	Sr.	DeLand, FL
10 King, Sihiem	5-9/172	So.	Colquitt, GA
32 Mahone, William	5-9/190	Jr.	Cincinnati, OH
30 Tobler, Ditalian	5-9/197	Fr.	Jacksonville, FL
18 Williams, Boom	5-9/196	Jr.	Monroe, GA

RECEIVERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
13 Badet, Jeff	6-0/175	Jr.	Orlando, FL
2 Baker, Dorian	6-3/208	Jr.	Cleveland Heights, OH
6 Bone, Blake	6-5/208	Jr.	Woodruff, SC
31 Bouvier, David	5-9/163	So.	Lexington, KY
8 Greenwood, Jabari	6-3/195	Fr.	Washington, DC
81 Holtzclaw, Dakota	6-7/215	Fr.	Columbus, OH
9 Johnson, Garrett	5-11/175	Jr.	Winter Garden, FL
20 Kendall, Ryan	5-10/193	So.	Charlotte, NC
17 Montgomery, Alexander	6-2/210	Jr.	Weston, FL
84 Moushey, Charles	6-0/180	Jr.	Westerville, OH
11 Richardson, Tavin	6-3/218	Fr.	Duncan, SC
42 Smith, Kynan	6-2/185	Fr.	Taylorsville, KY
1 Timmons, Ryan	5-10/198	Sr.	Frankfort, KY
80 Walker, C.J.	5-11/186	Fr.	Lexington, KY
88 Walker, Charles	5-11/203	Jr.	Louisville, KY

TIGHT ENDS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
87 Conrad, C.J.	6-5/245	So.	LaGrange, OH
49 Fink, Tanner	6-2/233	Sr.	Louisville, KY
85 Hart, Greg	6-5/245	Jr.	Dayton, OH
86 Long, Darryl	6-4/246	So.	Westerville, OH

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
64 Asafo-Adjei, George	6-5/315	So.	West Chester, OH
55 Baumer, David	6-5/307	So.	Cincinnati, OH
62 Greenberg, Dylan	6-2/308	Jr.	Tucson, AZ
68 Haynes, Nick	6-3/308	Jr.	Niceville, FL
52 Jackson, Drake	6-2/302	Fr.	Versailles, KY
67 LaRubbio, Jarrett	6-6/297	So.	Middletown, OH
75 Leavitt, Tate	6-6/310	Jr.	Thornville, OH
73 Meadows, Kyle	6-5/302	Jr.	West Chester, OH
69 Meyers, Ramsey	6-4/320	Jr.	Orange Park, FL
74 Mosier, Cole	6-6/335	Jr.	Walton, KY
57 Myers, Zach	6-3/300	Sr.	Miamisburg, OH
61 Salyer, Tristen	6-5/325	Fr.	Oil Springs, KY
56 Simpson, Sullivan	6-3/280	Fr.	Lexington, KY
65 Stallings, Jervontius	6-3/320	So.	Hoover, AL
71 Stenberg, Logan	6-6/318	Fr.	Madison, AL
72 Toth, Jon	6-5/310	Sr.	Indianapolis, IN
77 Wolfe, Mason	6-6/320	Fr.	Henderson, KY

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
92 Bell, Alvonte	6-5/260	Jr.	Miramar, FL
20 Daniel, Kengera	6-5/260	So.	Raleigh, NC
98 Dubose, Tymere	6-5/315	So.	Youngstown, OH
69 Elam, Matt	6-7/360	Jr.	Elizabethtown, KY
36 Hyde, Jacob	6-2/320	Jr.	Manchester, KY
96 Meant, Regie	6-4/302	Jr.	Cape Coral, FL
99 Middleton, Adrian	6-3/302	So.	Bowling Green, KY
94 Miggins, Courtney	6-5/285	Sr.	Lithonia, GA
77 Pringle, Naquez	6-3/330	Jr.	Georgetown, SC
60 Taylor Jr., Calvin	6-9/295	Fr.	Augusta, GA
78 Williams, Zane	6-4/285	Sr.	Lexington, KY

LINEBACKERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
41 Allen, Josh	6-5/224	So.	Montclair, NJ
39 Barnett, Elijah	6-3/230	Fr.	Lexington, KY
48 Black, Dameon	6-2/215	Fr.	Lexington, KY
43 Blue, Logan	6-4/246	So.	Owensboro, KY
32 Brown, Eli	6-2/208	Fr.	Bowling Green, KY
38 Brownell, Alex	6-2/210	Fr.	Union, KY
56 Daniel, Kash	6-1/235	Fr.	Paintsville, KY
40 Firios, Nico	6-2/242	So.	Longwood, FL
37 Foy, Spencer	6-4/225	So.	Louisville, KY
34 Jones, Jordan	6-2/215	So.	Youngstown, OH
44 Laster, De'Niro	6-4/235	Jr.	Cleveland Heights, OH
51 Love, Courtney	6-2/245	Jr.	Youngstown, OH
8 Walker, Kobie	6-3/215	So.	Baltimore, MD
35 Ware, Denzil	6-2/255	So.	Opp, AL

DEFENSIVE BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
29 Baity, Derrick	6-3/180	So.	Tampa, FL
28 Beckham, Kei	5-11/175	Fr.	Trotwood, OH
30 Brown, Isaiah	6-0/175	FR.	Martinez, GA
27 Edwards, Mike	6-0/200	So.	Cincinnati, OH
11 Harmon, J.D.	6-2/197	Sr.	Paducah, KY
31 Jennings, Darien	6-0/180	Fr.	Columbus, OH
24 McClain, Blake	5-11/200	Sr.	Winter Park, FL
15 McWilson, Marcus	6-0/208	Sr.	Youngstown, OH
5 Randolph, Kendall	6-0/180	Jr.	Tallahassee, FL
23 Tucker, Jared	5-11/175	So.	Stone Mountain, GA
4 Walker, Marcus	6-1/202	Fr.	Lake Wales, FL
25 West, Darius	6-0/210	So.	Lima, OH
21 Westry, Chris	6-4/195	So.	Orange Park, FL

SPECIALISTS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
53 Best, Blake (LS)	6-1/250	Fr.	Duluth, GA
95 Butler, Miles (K)	5-9/171	So.	Paducah, KY
93 Kirshe, Bryan (P)	6-0/150	So.	Sarasota, FL
99 MacGinnis, Austin (K)	5-10/180	Jr.	Wedowee, AL
58 Yeomans, Tristan (LS)	6-2/190	So.	Waycross, GA

Scouting the WILDCATS

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP KENTUCKY

"It's a big year for them. I mean, they fired everybody but the head coach so you know there's a lot of pressure to make a bowl game. They have enough talent. They've done a really good job recruiting, but you don't see a lot of cohesion to what they're doing on either side of the ball. I thought Shannon Dawson was really good and I'm surprised they made a change there, to be honest. I don't know what they'll be, but Eddie Gran runs the same kind of system and likes to go fast. They need to find a way to get Boom Williams more carries because I think he's just a tremendous talent. I'm not sure why they don't use him more — maybe a little bit injury prone or if he's a bit of a head case, but he's a guy who really worries you because he's so explosive. I felt like he could go 80 just about any time, but they didn't really play him that much. Between him and Jojo Kemp and bringing back their entire offensive line, they should be able to run the ball, but that system is really designed to pass first so I don't know what adjustments they're going to make. ... Defensively, I assume they'll still be that same seven-man front they've been in the last couple years, but they definitely haven't been as good as you'd think given what Mark Stoops did as a coordinator. They're not that far from winning some of these games, but when you look at how they've finished the last couple years, you wonder if maybe they're just a bit mentally fragile."

2015 RESULTS

RECORD: 5-7, 2-6 (SEC)

Sept. 5	UL Lafayette	W	40-33
Sept. 12	at South Carolina	W	26-22
Sept. 19	Florida	L	9-14
Sept. 26	Missouri	W	21-13
Oct. 3	Eastern Kentucky (ot)	W	34-27
Oct. 15	Auburn	L	27-30
Oct. 24	at Mississippi State	L	16-42
Oct. 31	Tennessee	L	21-52
Nov. 7	at Georgia	L	3-27
Nov. 14	at Vanderbilt	L	17-21
Nov. 21	Charlotte	W	58-10
Nov. 28	Louisville	L	24-38

CHRIS WESTRY

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Patrick Towles	326	183	2,148	9	14
Drew Barker	**70**	**35**	**364**	**1**	**2**

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Boom Williams	**121**	**855**	**7.1**	**6**
Jojo Kemp	**98**	**555**	**5.7**	**6**
Mikel Horton	**82**	**318**	**3.9**	**3**
Sihiem King	**11**	**127**	**11.5**	**1**

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Dorian Baker	**55**	**608**	**11.1**	**3**
Garrett Johnson	**46**	**694**	**15.1**	**2**
Jeff Badet	**29**	**430**	**14.8**	**2**
Blake Bone	**20**	**210**	**10.5**	**1**

KICKING: **Austin MacGinnis, 13-17 FGs, 22-23 XPs, 61 points**

TACKLES: Josh Forrest, 93; Two players tied with 67

SACKS: Josh Forrest, 3.5

INTERCEPTIONS: **J.D. Harmon, 3**

Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	24.7 ppg	10	95
Rushing	162.7 ypg	9	78
Passing	209.3 ypg	6	79
Total	372.0 ypg	9	89

DEFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	27.4 ppg	13	69
Rushing	196.1 ypg	12	97
Passing	198.1 ypg	5	28
Total	394.2 ypg	12	59

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
-2	-0.17	11	85

MATT ELAM

as a junior college transfer. Stoops expressed cautious optimism about the group toward the end of spring, but it's a major question mark.

LINEBACKERS Outside linebacker Denzil Ware returns after starting 11 of 12 games during his debut season in 2015, but he will be one of the few sources of experience at the second level of the defense. Outside linebacker Josh Allen played on special teams as a freshman but saw little action on defense, and Kobie Walker is still waiting for his UK debut. Both players will be needed to improve a pass rush that ranked 109th nationally in sacks (17). Junior middle linebacker Courtney Love is being hailed as the defense's leader after sitting out a year as a Nebraska transfer, but even he has only six career tackles to his name. Sophomore Jordan Jones and redshirt freshman Eli Brown will be counted on at the other inside linebacker position. Minnesota transfer De'Niro Laster could contribute at inside or outside linebacker but spent most of his spring at the outside position.

DEFENSIVE BACKS The secondary was the most improved position group on the roster in 2015 thanks in large part to the contributions of freshmen Chris Westry, Derrick Baity, Mike Edwards and Darius West. All four players could start as sophomores this fall, but senior nickel back Blake McClain and senior safety Marcus McWilson should also play key roles. Westry looks the part of a future star after earning SEC All-Freshman honors at cornerback, but he was the target of some not-so-subtle prodding from his coaches in the spring not to rest on his laurels. Stoops finally has the size he has longed for in the secondary with three corners listed at 6'2" or taller. The addition of three highly touted freshmen will only add to what is the deepest position on defense.

SPECIALISTS Kicking was a significant problem for Kentucky in 2015 with former All-SEC place kicker Austin MacGinnis battling a nagging groin injury and senior punter Landon Foster posting the worst season of his career. Foster graduated, but MacGinnis returns and reported being back to 100 percent in the spring. MacGinnis already holds six school records, including longest field goal (54 yards), and has the potential to shorten the field significantly for the offense. Freshman punter Grant McKinniss, who was rated as a four-star recruit by Scout, will need to make an immediate impact. UK's return game has added little excitement in the Stoops era, but King showed potential on kickoffs as a freshman.

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	27.6	113
DEFENSE	32.0	111
MARGIN	-4.4	113
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	37.4%	108
DEFENSE	44.2%	94
MARGIN	-6.8%	107
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	5.5	78
DEFENSE	5.6	61
MARGIN	-0.1	80
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	4.4	65
DEFENSE	4.0	29
MARGIN	+0.4	46
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	1.6	44
ACTUAL	-2	83
MARGIN	-3.6	108

KEY: **1**-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

NUMBERS TO KNOW

-4.4 Kentucky's field position margin was an abysmal minus-4.4 yards per possession, 113th in FBS and 14th in the SEC. On average, the Wildcats began drives at the 27.6 (113th) while opponents started at the 32.0 (111th). Neither the offense nor defense was solid enough to overcome the tilted field.

14.2 The loss of star ends Bud Dupree and Za'Darius Smith after 2014 crippled the Kentucky defense's playmaking ability up front. The Wildcats made run stops at or behind the line just 14.2 percent of the time (121st in FBS) and sacked the quarterback just 6.1 percent of the time on passing downs (second-and-8 or more, third-and-5 or more, fourth-and-five or more), 88th.

43.1 Drew Barker was a four-star signee out of high school, but as with many true or redshirt freshmen, his first audition at quarterback was far from outstanding. In significant action against Charlotte and Louisville, he completed just 22-of-51 passes (a 43.1 percent completion rate) for 257 yards. He didn't throw any interceptions in those two games, but even in the easy win over Charlotte, his passer rating didn't hit 100.

9.8 After a 2–1 start in SEC play, Kentucky's performance trailed off sharply. In their final five conference games, plus the end-of-season loss to Louisville, the Wildcats underachieved compared to the Vegas spread an average of 9.8 points per game. The only time they beat the spread after September was against Charlotte.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION

Linebackers	5
Defensive Linemen	4
Offensive Linemen	4
Defensive Backs	3
Quarterbacks	2
Running Backs	2
Wide Receivers	2
Athletes	1
Tight Ends	1
Punters	1

BY STATE

Ohio	14
Kentucky	5
Georgia	2
Alabama	1
California	1
Maryland	1
South Carolina	1

Kentucky's 2016 signing class checked in 12 spots lower than its record-setting 2014 group in the 247Sports Composite ranking, but Wildcats coach Mark Stoops is convinced that, despite what the rankings say, it's his best class yet.

"From my point of view, absolutely top to bottom, I feel like it's the most solid group," Stoops said. "I feel like there's elite talent in this group, and I feel like there's great glue, there's great players, great program guys."

The nucleus of the 2016 class centered on three in-state U.S. Army All-Americans: five-star offensive tackle Landon Young, four-star center Drake Jackson and four-star linebacker Kash Daniel. Young was the first player rated as a five-star prospect by Rivals to sign with UK since the website starting rating recruits in 2002. Six other players in the 25-man class were rated as four-star prospects by at least one of the four major recruiting services.

Unlike the 2015 recruiting cycle when Kentucky lost six commitments in a span of eight days shortly before Signing Day, Stoops and his staff lost just one commitment between the end of the season and Signing Day.

Young, Jackson, junior college transfer Tate Leavitt and three-star Ohio prep tackle Luke Fortner form the strength of the class on the offensive line. Four-star Georgia native Jordan Griffin, three-star Lexington native Davonte Robinson and three-star Ohio native Tobias Gilliam add additional depth to what is an already young and talented secondary.

Whether the group is able to help a UK pass rush that struggled in 2015 remains to be seen. Junior college outside linebacker Jordan Bonner could help this fall, but he was unable to enroll for the spring semester and was injured in a physical altercation at the home of his infant son in March. Three-star outside linebackers Jaylin Bannerman and Jamar Watson are the other hopes for edge-rushing help in the class.

SPOTLIGHT ON

LANDON YOUNG

OL • LEXINGTON, KY

Almost three years after first committing to Kentucky, Lexington native Landon Young officially became the first Rivals five-star recruit to sign with UK in February.

Young first committed to Kentucky in June 2013 then saw his recruiting stock explode as a senior, earning a U.S. Army All-American Bowl selection and five-star status. Despite Kentucky's back-to-back 5–7 seasons during that time, Young's commitment never wavered.

"I actually had coaches still texting me until the very last minute here before I signed this morning and signed those papers," he said on Signing Day. "It's a really awesome thing to be able to finally say, 'It's done with. I'm with UK. I'm officially a Wildcat.'"

Fellow offensive line recruits Drake Jackson and Tate Leavitt enrolled at UK for the spring semester, but Young remained at Lafayette High School to compete in wrestling — he won the state title at 285 pounds — and track and field.

Still, he was a frequently spotted at UK's early morning spring practices during Lafayette's spring break.

"There's some guys that they might be off on spring break and go to the beach or they might not want to get up at seven in the morning and come over here," offensive line coach John Schlarman says. "That says a lot about him."

Young appears all but certain to play a role for UK this fall. With the tackles struggling at times in the spring, Young could immediately compete for a spot in the rotation and even a starting job.

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
Jaylin Bannerman	LB	6-5/220	Pickerington, OH	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	868
Jordan Bonner	OLB	6-5/220	Lyndhurst, OH	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	65*
T.J. Carter	DE	6-4/245	Mableton, GA	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	1,096
Ja'Quize Cross	DT	6-3/315	New Market, AL	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	1,402
Kash Daniel	ILB	6-1/235	Paintsville, KY	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	310
Luke Fortner	OT	6-6/305	Sylvania, OH	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	1,406
Tobias Gilliam	CB	5-11/190	Dayton, OH	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	734
Jordan Griffin	CB	6-0/175	Jonesboro, GA	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	387
Gunnar Hoak	QB	6-4/190	Dublin, OH	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	875
Dakota Holtzclaw	WR	6-7/215	Columbus, OH	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	795
Zy'Aire Hughes	ATH	6-1/190	Paducah, KY	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	743
Drake Jackson	OC	6-2/302	Versailles, KY	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	141
Stephen Johnson II	QB	6-3/190	Rancho Cucamonga, CA	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	209
Tate Leavitt	OT	6-6/310	Thornville, OH	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	28*
Kordell Looney	DT	6-3/285	Springfield, OH	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	930
Grant McKinniss	P	6-1/210	Findlay, OH	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★★	1,484
Naquez Pringle	DT	6-2/330	Georgetown, SC	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	246*
Justin Rigg	TE	6-6/245	Springboro, OH	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	1,465
Davonte Robinson	CB	6-2/180	Lexington, KY	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	980
Asim Rose	RB	6-1/200	Cleveland, OH	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	1,098
Kayaune Ross	WR	6-6/225	West Chester, OH	★★★	NR	★★★	★★★	108*
Benny Snell	RB	5-11/220	Westerville, OH	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	878
Roland Walder	ILB	6-3/215	Dayton, OH	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	918
Jamar Watson	OLB	6-3/225	Forestville, MD	★★★	★★	★★	★★★	1,640
Landon Young	OT	6-7/305	Lexington, KY	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	79

*junior college transfer

MISSOURI TIGERS

National Forecast: **62** /// *SEC East Prediction:* **6**

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	at West Virginia
Sept. 10	Eastern Michigan
Sept. 17	Georgia
Sept. 24	Delaware State
Oct. 1	at LSU
Oct. 15	at Florida
Oct. 22	Middle Tennessee
Oct. 29	Kentucky
Nov. 5	at South Carolina
Nov. 12	Vanderbilt
Nov. 19	at Tennessee
Nov. 26	Arkansas

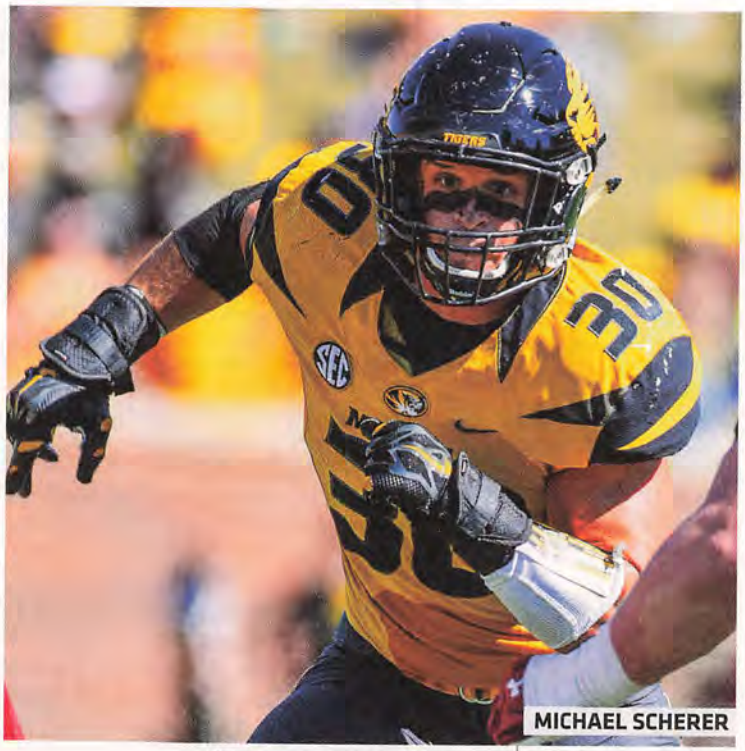
A five-win season is, by definition, likely to be rather unmemorable. You were good enough to win some games and almost make a bowl, but your fatal flaws, which were probably obvious in September, kept getting in the way. A five-win season is one of frustration and the quickest possible moving-on process.

That's usually the case, anyway. Missouri's 2015 campaign, on the other hand, was all sorts of memorable. First, the offense bottomed out in a way almost no one would have thought possible. The Tigers averaged just 13.6 points per game, second-worst in the country. Quarterback Maty Mauk was suspended twice and didn't play after Sept. 26; with or without him, the Tigers scored fewer than 10 points in six games and topped 13 just once after Week 5. The Tigers also had one of the best defenses in the country, but it just didn't matter. While allowing more than 21 points just twice all year, Mizzou still lost seven games.

Then there were the off-the-field matters. In early November, Mizzou players announced a boycott in support of racial protests and a hunger strike on campus. The boycott only lasted a couple of days and didn't affect an actual game, but it helped to get the school president to resign. The repercussions of both the protests and the successful boycott will be felt for a while, both in terms of Missouri politics and in the perceived power student-athletes hold.

A few days after the boycott ended, meanwhile, head coach Gary Pinkel announced that he had lymphoma and would be retiring after the season, his 15th in Columbia. He won 118 games at Mizzou, twice finished in the AP top five, and went to four conference title games, but his final year was a disappointment.

Missouri stayed in-house to find Pinkel's replacement. Barry Odom, a successful defensive coordinator at both Memphis and Missouri, took the job and replaced a good portion of Pinkel's staff. His Tiger defense should again be stout, but nothing else matters until or unless the offense rebounds.



MICHAEL SCHERER

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 5-7, 2-6 SEC

After winning back-to-back SEC East titles, Missouri regressed to a 1–7 mark in league play thanks to an offense that ranked among the worst in the nation. In SEC play, MU scored a total of six touchdowns and averaged only 9.1 points per game. The Tigers have their quarterback in place, but Drew Lock struggled through most of his true freshman season. There are also questions on the offensive line and a lack of proven playmakers at the skill positions. The defense, however, should be elite once again for new head coach (and former Missouri defensive coordinator) Barry Odom. Still, Mizzou won't make much of a climb in the SEC East unless the offense finds a way to score more points.

QUARTERBACKS Blue-chipper Drew Lock became the face of the offense more quickly than anyone would have imagined. Thanks to Mauk's suspension, Lock was the starter by his fifth game on campus. With almost no support — the run game was mostly dreadful, and his receivers were mostly sophomores — Lock's season was a struggle. He completed less than 44 percent of his passes in six of eight starts, which outweighed a couple of good performances (he was 40-for-56 against South Carolina and BYU). Lock enters his sophomore season with new coaching (offensive coordinator Josh Heupel takes over as mentor), new competition (Mizzou signed junior college transfer Jack Lowary in February to push him) and a much more experienced receiving corps at his disposal. His throwing motion is still museum-worthy, and there's still time for him to develop into the star he was supposed to become, but last year proved how far he might still have to go.

RUNNING BACKS With Russell Hansbrough injuring his ankle on his first carry of the season, Ish Witter ended up leading the team in both carries and yards. Thanks to inexperience and suspect blocking, he struggled, averaging just 4.1 yards per carry for the season. But he showed

5-YEAR WIN TREND

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

THE PROTÉGÉ TAKES OVER Barry Odom got his first big break when Gary Pinkel hired the former Mizzou linebacker, first as a graduate assistant in 2003, then as director of recruiting in 2004, then as director of football operations in 2006. He jumped to Memphis in 2012 to get coordinator experience, but from the moment he returned to Columbia to run the defense last year, it felt like he was Pinkel's logical successor, even if few thought he would be doing the succeeding quite this quickly.

BOYCOTT HAD PINKEL'S SUPPORT One of Pinkel's final acts as Missouri's head coach might end up being one of the most significant of his tenure. By supporting his players during their November boycott, he proved both the sturdiness of the family atmosphere he always preached and, for better or worse, the power that a college football team can have in campus politics, even in a frustrating year on the field.

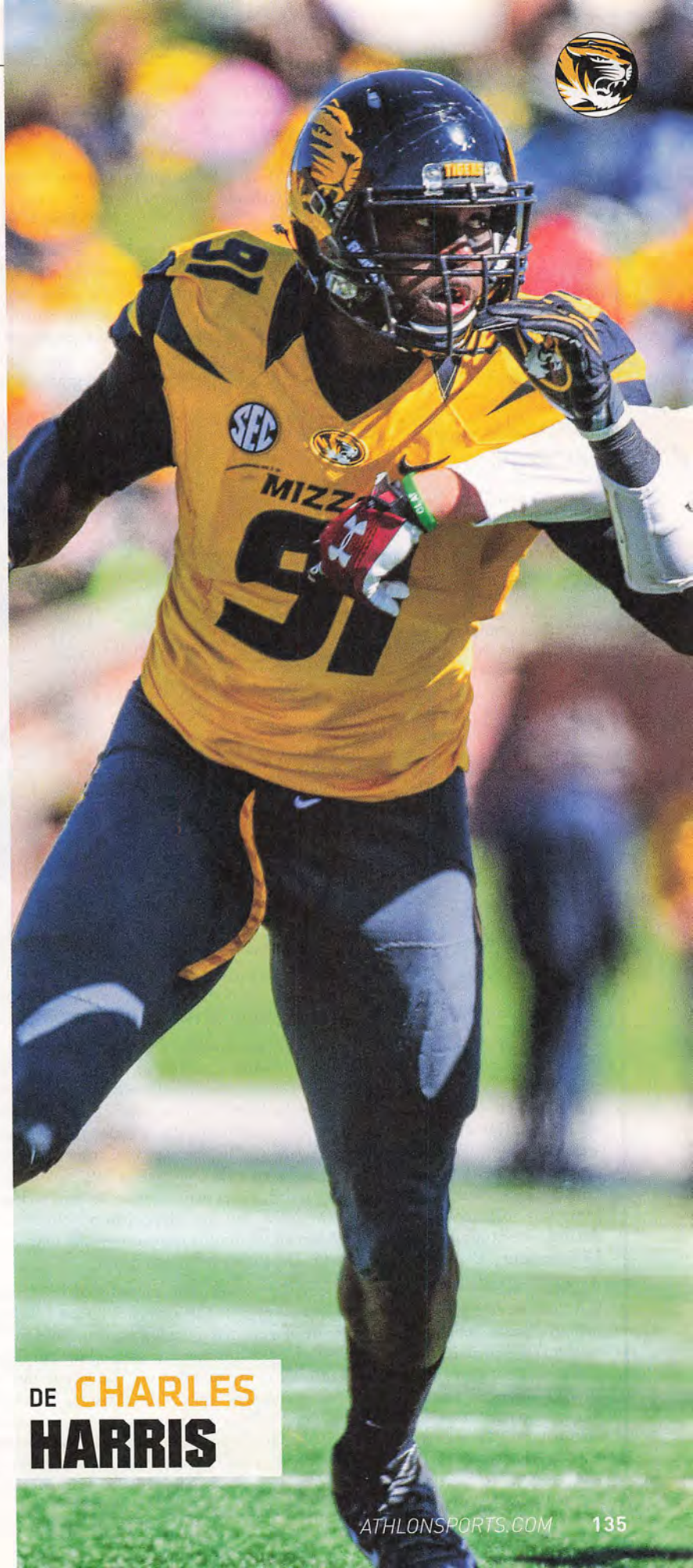
THE TACKLING MACHINE RETURNS When Odom was a freshman at Mizzou in 1996, one of his on-field mentors was senior free safety DeMontie Cross, who finished his career as the Tigers' all-time leading tackler despite playing only three seasons in black and gold. The two evidently made a strong connection, as Odom plucked Cross away from TCU and made him defensive coordinator.

HAROLD'S LONG ROAD BACK Harold Brantley suffered a fractured leg, damaged knee ligaments and fractured ribs when he was involved in a ghastly June 2015 car accident. After a series of surgeries, academic issues and weight loss, Brantley finally saw practice time during the spring. It has yet to be determined how much he'll be able to contribute when the season starts.

WINNING MORE THAN DAD It could have been worse. In Andy Lock's first two years on campus as an offensive lineman in 1985-86, Missouri went just 4–18. Granted, the offense was a bit more successful than it was in 2015, but Andy's son Drew was able to play a role in five wins as a freshman just a few months removed from his senior prom.

TWO-STAR ALL-STARS When Charles Harris signed with Missouri on Signing Day 2013, it surprised even recruiting reporters. Rivals didn't even have a profile for him. He was eventually given a two-star rating. A year later, Mizzou signed two-star Walter Brady, whose only other official visit was to Middle Tennessee. These two two-stars recorded 31 tackles for a loss in 2015. Both return this fall.

AN EAST ST. LOUIS PIPELINE From 2001 to 2013, Pinkel signed just two players from East St. Louis High (defensive back Julius Denzmore in 2004 and lineman Ty Phillips in 2009), and neither made an impact in Columbia. But Pinkel's parting gift to Odom might be a pipeline to ESL. In the last two signing classes, Mizzou has inked four Flyers: five-star Terry Beckner Jr., four-star Nate Strong and three-stars Greg Taylor and Tre'Vour Simms. One of the most historically talented high schools in the Midwest has taken a shine to Mizzou.



DE **CHARLES HARRIS**

flashes of development, averaging 4.8 per carry and catching three passes for 54 yards in the last four games. Those numbers aren't good enough, however, to assume he will start. He was pushed by sophomore Trevon Walters (who was ahead of Witter on the depth chart before injuring his knee last spring and missing the season) and redshirt freshman Ryan Williams in the spring, and two highly touted recruits — sophomore Nate Strong and freshman Damarea Crockett — are expected to join the battle in fall camp.

RECEIVERS Mizzou will have quantity and experience in 2016 — whether it will have quality remains to be seen. Last year's receiving corps had no chance, with tight end Sean Culkin missing time with injury and a rotating cast of characters showing glimpses of potential but not sustaining them. J'Mon Moore and Nate Brown led the way but combined for only 676 receiving yards, and freshmen and sophomores ended up accounting for 121 of the Tigers' 186 receptions. But there are no excuses in 2016. Moore and Brown are now juniors and will be joined by Alabama graduate transfer and former blue-chipper Chris Black, junior college transfer Dominic Collins, two promising redshirt freshmen (Johnathon Johnson and Justin Smith) and a host of sophomores. Lock desperately needs a security blanket, and in the spring at least, Black filled that role nicely.

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)

WR	1	Chris Black (Sr.)	12	Johnathon Johnson (Fr.)
WR	2	**Nate Brown (Jr.)**	15	Keyon Dilosa (So.)
WR	6	**J'Mon Moore (Jr.)**	84	Emanuel Hall (So.)
LT	76	Tyler Howell (Jr.)	65	Tanner Owen (Fr.)
LG	55	**Nate Crawford (Jr.)**		Tre'vour Simms (Fr.)
C	57	Alec Abeln (Jr.)	56	Samson Bailey (So.)
RG	71	Kevin Pendleton (So.)	69	AJ Harris (Fr.)
RT	77	Paul Adams (So.)		Trystan Castillo (Fr.)
TE	80	**Sean Culkin (Sr.)**	10	Jason Reese (Jr.)
QB	3	**Drew Lock (So.)**	1	Marvin Zanders (So.)
RB		Nate Strong (So.)	21	Ish Witter (Jr.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE	91	**Charles Harris (Jr.)**	88	Nate Howard (So.)
DT	97	**Josh Augusta (Sr.)**	18	Josh Moore (So.)
DT	79	Terry Beckner Jr. (So.)	95	**Rickey Hatley (Sr.)**
DE	56	**Walter Brady (So.)**	16	Marcell Frazier (Jr.)
OLB	25	**Donavin Newsom (Sr.)**	24	Terez Hall (So.)
MLB	30	**Michael Scherer (Sr.)**	29	Trey Baldwin (Fr.)
OLB	4	Brandon Lee (So.)	34	Joey Burkett (Jr.)
CB	11	**Aarion Penton (Sr.)**	1	Anthony Hines (Jr.)
CB	5	John Gibson (Sr.)	28	Logan Cheadle (Jr.)
SS	8	Thomas Wilson (Jr.)	7	Cam Hilton (So.)
FS	22	**Anthony Sherrils (Jr.)**		Greg Taylor (So.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	7	Tucker McCann (Fr.)	KR	5	John Gibson (Sr.)
P	26	Corey Fatony (So.)	PR	11	Aarion Penton (Sr.)

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN The Missouri line was doomed from the start in 2015; star center Evan Boehm suffered an injury in the first quarter of the season, and due to depth issues, standout guard Connor McGovern was forced to move to left tackle. Despite five seniors accounting for most of the starts, the line was a disaster. The positive spin is that this is a pretty good time for a fresh start; the negative spin is that there weren't enough healthy scholarship players to fill a two-deep up front in the spring. Though it could be possible to come up with a decent starting five — juniors Nate Crawford and Alec Abeln both have starting experience, junior college tackle Tyler Howell is both enormous and well-regarded, and the athleticism of youngsters Paul Adams and Samson Bailey has been touted within the program — any injuries could be devastating. Crawford was limited in the spring with back issues.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN Missouri's offensive issues were exacerbated by the simple fact that the defense was playing so incredibly well but couldn't even get a little bit of help. And once again, the catalyst for the Tigers' defensive success came up front. It's a new era for Mizzou, however, because while almost every defensive lineman from last year's excellent unit returns, the man leading the unit did not. Longtime line coach Craig Kuligowski left for Miami (Fla.) and was replaced by Arizona State's Jackie Shipp, who has had plenty of success himself. Shipp inherits an incredible set of weapons, including ends Charles Harris, Walter Brady and Marcell Frazier, who combined for 37 tackles for a loss and 16 sacks. He also gets to work with mountainous tackle Josh Augusta (8.5 tackles for a loss) and sophomore blue-chipper Terry Beckner Jr.,

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH
Barry Odom

RECORD AT SCHOOL
First Season

CAREER RECORD
First Season

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Josh Heupel

CO-DEFENSIVE COORDINATORS
DeMontie Cross, Ryan Walters

LOCATION
Columbia, MO

STADIUM
Memorial Stadium (71,168)

KEY TIGERS

DREW LOCK, QB His mechanics are still gorgeous, but the sophomore has a lot to prove after getting thrown into the fire and struggling mightily as a true freshman.

CHARLES HARRIS, DE The former no-star recruit considered NFL early entry after recording 18.5 tackles for a loss but returned to join another loaded line.

TERRY BECKNER JR., DT The former blue-chipper was a block of granite in the interior line when healthy.

AARION PENTON, CB Opponents began to look away from Penton's side of the field, but he still managed 4.5 tackles for a loss and eight passes defensed as a junior.

MICHAEL SCHERER, LB Destined to become Missouri's leading tackler with Kentrell Brothers gone, the senior is the rare combination of mess cleaner and playmaker.

KEY LOSSES

KENTRELL BROTHERS, LB Brothers was good before his breakout senior season, but he was on another level in 2015.

EVAN BOEHM, C That Boehm was limping from almost the first snap of the season hurt the Tigers' offense significantly, but it could have been much worse without him.

IAN SIMON, S An underappreciated play-prevention guy, Simon was a contributor for four seasons and had two interceptions and four break-ups as a senior.

CONNOR MCGOVERN, LT Perhaps the strongest member of the 2015 squad was probably Mizzou's best guard and tackle last year.

RUSSELL HANSBROUGH, RB Hansbrough rushed for 1,084 yards and 10 touchdowns as a junior in 2014 but was hobbled from almost the start of 2015 and struggled.

RISING STAR

Wide receiver **Chris Black** was a top-100 recruit and looked like he might become a steady option for eventual national champion Alabama. But an ankle injury held him to just two catches in 2015. He gets a chance to prove himself in a new SEC locale and began with a strong spring.

Lock: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports; Penton: AP

2016 MISSOURI ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
35 Jacoby, Zane	6-4/205	Fr.	Huntsville, MO
3 Lock, Drew	6-4/205	So.	Lee's Summit, MO
7 Lowary, Jack	6-4/215	Jr.	Huntington Beach, CA
1 Zanders, Marvin	6-1/185	So.	Jacksonville, FL

RUNNING BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
46 Conway, Shaun	5-9/180	Jr.	Ferguson, MO
5 Doherty, Marquise	6-1/205	Fr.	Kansas City, MO
20 Walters, Trevon	5-10/200	So.	Bradenton, FL
4 Williams, Ryan	6-0/180	Fr.	Lee's Summit, MO
21 Witter, Ish	5-10/190	Jr.	Tampa, FL

RECEIVERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
19 Akushe, Oke	5-10/185	Jr.	St. Louis, MO
1 Black, Chris	6-0/192	Sr.	Jacksonville, FL
17 Blair, DeSean	6-3/190	So.	Jacksonville, FL
26 Brents, Jake	6-3/205	Sr.	Springfield, MO
2 Brown, Nate	6-3/205	Jr.	Suwanee, GA
15 Dilosa, Keyon	6-3/200	So.	Round Rock, TX
85 Floyd, Richaud	5-11/185	Fr.	Gulfport, MS
84 Hall, Emanuel	6-3/200	So.	Franklin, TN
32 Hull, Tanner	6-0/220	Sr.	Kansas City, MO
12 Johnson, Johnathon	5-10/175	Fr.	Memphis, TN
41 Laurent, Eric	6-2/215	Sr.	Ballwin, MO
24 Martini, Brendan	6-2/190	Jr.	O'Fallon, IL
6 Moore, J'Mon	6-3/190	Jr.	Missouri City, TX
19 Perkins, Ronnell	6-0/185	Fr.	St. Louis, MO
45 Rhone, Nick	5-10/200	Jr.	Beaumont, TX
8 Smith, Justin	6-7/200	Fr.	Dublin, GA
28 Spadarotto, Steven	6-2/185	So.	Santa Maria, CA
14 Wingo, Ray	5-11/180	So.	St. Louis, MO

TIGHT ENDS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
11 Blanton, Kendall	6-6/250	So.	Blue Springs, MO
80 Culkin, Sean	6-6/245	Sr.	Indian Rocks Beach, FL
10 Reese, Jason	6-5/250	Jr.	Euless, TX

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
57 Abeln, Alec	6-3/290	Jr.	St. Louis, MO
77 Adams, Paul	6-6/290	So.	Nashville, TN
56 Bailey, Samson	6-4/270	So.	Lamar, MO
55 Crawford, Nate	6-5/300	Jr.	Pensacola, FL
67 Dubinski, Jonah	6-2/275	Fr.	Columbia, MO
62 Grossman, Thomas	6-3/260	So.	St. Louis, MO
69 Harris, AJ	6-4/285	Fr.	Stilwell, KS
76 Howell, Tyler	6-8/305	Jr.	Bonner Springs, KS
65 Owen, Tanner	6-5/280	Fr.	Kearney, MO
71 Pendleton, Kevin	6-4/315	So.	Lee's Summit, MO
66 Ploudre, Adam	6-4/295	Jr.	Ballwin, MO
72 Rhodes, Clay	6-5/290	Jr.	Stilwell, KS
61 Roland, Adam	6-3/315	So.	St. Louis, MO
81 Whitehouse, Harley	6-0/220	Fr.	St. Louis, MO

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
97 Augusta, Josh	6-4/345	Sr.	Peoria, IL
79 Beckner Jr., Terry	6-4/300	So.	East St. Louis, IL
56 Brady, Walter	6-3/255	So.	Florence, AL
90 Brantley, Harold	6-3/280	Sr.	Hershey, PA
51 Cruz, Ed	6-2/230	Jr.	Park Hills, MO
16 Frazier, Marcell	6-5/265	Jr.	Portland, OR
89 Hanneke, Tyler	6-4/250	Sr.	St. Charles, MO
87 Harold, Jordan	6-2/245	Jr.	St. Louis, MO
91 Harris, Charles	6-3/255	Jr.	Kansas City, MO
95 Hatley, Rickey	6-4/285	Sr.	Atlanta, TX
88 Howard, Nate	6-4/235	So.	St. Louis, MO
94 Jacobs, Tyrell	6-4/265	Fr.	Kenner, LA
96 Logan, A.J.	6-2/300	Jr.	Columbia, MO
98 McWilliams, Rocel	6-2/240	So.	Pensacola, FL
18 Moore, Josh	6-5/260	So.	Olathe, KS
52 Serrano, Eddie	6-3/235	Jr.	Niles, IL
13 Williams, Spencer	6-3/245	So.	Jacksonville, FL

LINEBACKERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
45 Agbasimere, Franklin	6-2/220	Fr.	Lagos, Nigeria
29 Baldwin, Trey	6-2/240	Fr.	Houston, TX
38 Beisel, Eric	6-3/225	Jr.	Fenton, MO
34 Burkett, Joey	6-2/210	Jr.	Jefferson City, MO
47 Garrett, Cale	6-3/225	Fr.	Kearney, MO
24 Hall, Terez	6-2/215	So.	Lithonia, GA
15 Jones, Grant	6-3/225	So.	Columbia, MO
4 Lee, Brandon	6-2/220	So.	Indianapolis, IN
25 Newsom, Donavin	6-2/230	Sr.	St. Louis, MO
59 Piazza, Justin	6-0/205	Jr.	St. Petersburg, FL
30 Scherer, Michael	6-3/235	Sr.	St. Louis, MO
50 Trump, Jacob	6-3/225	So.	Kahoka, MO
53 Williams, Christian	6-0/235	Sr.	Lake Ozark, MO
48 Winters, Roderick	5-11/225	So.	Arlington, TX

DEFENSIVE BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
16 Bondurant, Brock	6-2/215	Sr.	Memphis, MO
28 Cheadle, Logan	5-10/180	Jr.	Lee's Summit, MO
5 Gibson, John	6-0/190	Sr.	Missouri City, TX
7 Hilton, Cam	6-0/180	So.	St. Louis, MO
1 Hines, Anthony	6-1/190	Jr.	S. San Francisco, CA
12 Nelson, Dominic	6-0/185	Jr.	Florissant, MO
11 Penton, Aarion	5-10/190	Sr.	St. Louis, MO
36 Pierre, Isiah	5-9/165	So.	Hollywood, FL
6 Ross, Tavon	6-0/200	So.	Cochran, GA
22 Sherrils, Anthony	6-0/200	Jr.	Kansas City, MO
31 Stribling IV, Finis	5-11/175	So.	Thompson's Station, TN
9 Warren, TJ	5-11/190	Fr.	Conyers, GA
8 Wilson, Thomas	5-10/190	Jr.	Suwanee, GA

SPECIALISTS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
91 Adams, Turner (K)	6-0/195	Jr.	Springfield, MO
93 Carr, Andrew (K)	6-1/175	So.	Cameron, MO
90 Coffman, Nick (K)	5-11/175	Sr.	Missouri City, TX
26 Fatony, Corey (P)	5-11/185	So.	Franklin, TN
86 Hurrell, Jake (LS)	6-3/235	Sr.	St. Peters, MO
3 Jackson, Luke (K)	6-1/185	Jr.	Pensacola, FL
7 McCann, Tucker (K)	6-0/185	Fr.	O'Fallon, IL

Scouting the TIGERS

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP MISSOURI

"It'll be interesting because Barry Odom has been an odd-front guy his whole career and they play a head-up nose and two guys in the B gaps and you're just not running the ball against him. They're simply not going to let you do it, and they'll bring pressure different ways off that. What's funny, though, is he hired a defensive coordinator from TCU where they do it totally differently. So I'm curious to see what they run and how they do it, but Odom is just tremendous. What he did at Memphis with that defense was so hard, and then he goes up there last year at Mizzou and darn near has to win games by himself because they just couldn't score. But with him becoming the head coach, I think what kind of defense they actually run is one of the key questions for teams as they get ready for Mizzou because it totally changes the way you gameplan. ... Personnel-wise, they just crank out defensive linemen. They've got a ton of 'em. Charles Harris is just a terror on film, and if Harold Brantley comes back off the injuries, that's going to give them that much more depth. ... I think offensively they struggled last year because they weren't real sure whose team it was at quarterback and maybe both of them were afraid to take charge, so it'll probably help them now that they can focus on one guy. Drew Lock is very talented physically and he's got some game experience, so if he meshes well with Josh Heupel and the new system he's got a chance to have a good year."

2015 RESULTS

RECORD: 5-7, 1-7 (SEC)

Sept. 5	SE Missouri State	W	34-3
Sept. 12	at Arkansas State	W	27-20
Sept. 19	Connecticut	W	9-6
Sept. 26	at Kentucky	L	13-21
Oct. 3	South Carolina	W	24-10
Oct. 10	Florida	L	3-21
Oct. 17	at Georgia	L	6-9
Oct. 24	at Vanderbilt	L	3-10
Nov. 5	Mississippi State	L	13-31
Nov. 14	vs. BYU #	W	20-16
Nov. 21	Tennessee	L	8-19
Nov. 27	at Arkansas	L	3-28

#Kansas City

AARON PENTON

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Drew Lock	**263**	**129**	**1,332**	**4**	**8**
Maty Mauk	110	57	654	6	4

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Ish Witter	**126**	**518**	**4.1**	**1**
Russell Hansbrough	111	436	3.9	1
Tyler Hunt	42	185	4.4	1
Maty Mauk	36	145	4.0	1

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
J'Mon Moore	**29**	**350**	**12.1**	**3**
Nate Brown	**27**	**326**	**12.1**	**4**
Wesley Leftwich	22	285	12.9	1
Russell Hansbrough	17	59	3.5	0

KICKING: Andrew Baggett, 16-20 FGs, 15-15 XPs, 63 points

TACKLES: Kentrell Brothers, 152; **Michael Scherer, 93**

SACKS: **Charles Harris, 7.0; Walter Brady, 7.0**

INTERCEPTIONS: Kentrell Brothers, 2; Ian Simon, 2

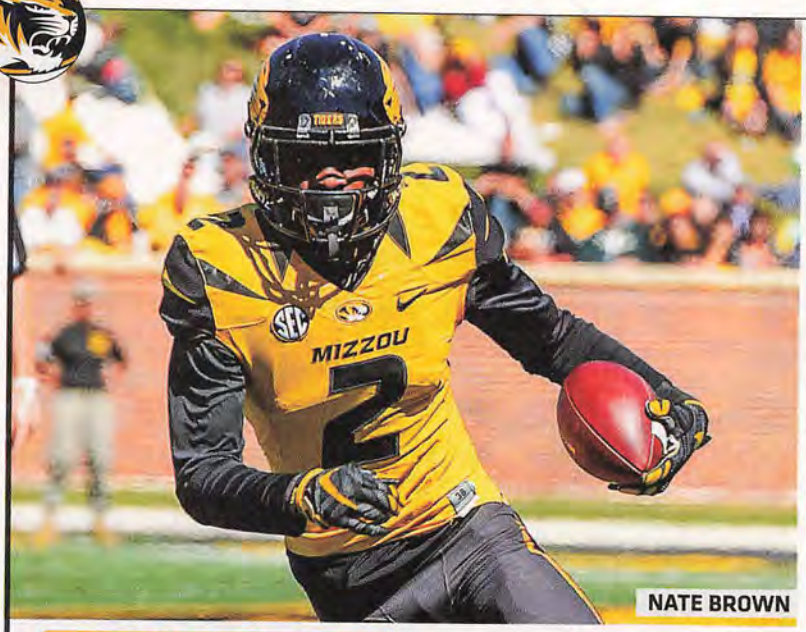
Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	13.6 ppg	14	127
Rushing	115.4 ypg	14	120
Passing	165.5 ypg	14	113
Total	280.9 ypg	14	125

DEFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	16.2 ppg	2	5
Rushing	132.8 ypg	6	28
Passing	169.3 ypg	3	5
Total	302.0 ypg	2	6

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
-1	-0.08	10	79



NATE BROWN

who missed the end of the year with a knee injury but still recorded eight TFLs and three sacks. The depth is impressive enough that Missouri can afford to work 2014 star Harold Brantley slowly back into the fold; Brantley was severely injured in a car accident last summer and redshirted.

LINEBACKERS New linebackers coach (and co-defensive coordinator) DeMontie Cross inherits a pretty stocked cupboard. Middle linebacker Michael Scherer is the requisite quarterback of the defense. Senior Donavin Newsom was overshadowed by All-SEC performer Kentrell Brothers (who has since graduated) but still logged nine tackles for a loss last season. Former star recruits Brandon Lee and Terez Hall are both sophomores who could find plenty of playing time, as should junior Joey Burkett. The calling card of an Odom defense is versatility, and he and Cross should have fun mixing between 3-4 and 4-3 personnel. They have a lot of options in their front seven.

DEFENSIVE BACKS Relatively speaking, the secondary is the least known of Missouri's defensive units, but there are still at least two pieces to like. Senior cornerback Aarion Penton and junior safety Anthony Sherrils were stalwarts last fall. They combined for 8.5 tackles for a loss, 14 passes defensed and two forced fumbles. They benefited from a strong pass rush, but they were still outstanding. There are questions at the other spots in the back, though. Senior John Gibson and junior Logan Cheadle (cousin of actor Don Cheadle) will continue to battle for the starting cornerback spot, and any number of players could start opposite Sherrils, from junior Thomas Wilson to sophomore Cam Hilton (who spent time at receiver last year) to incoming junior college transfer Greg Taylor. While the starting four should be fine, depth could become a concern here.

SPECIALISTS This unit contains one answer and two questions. Punter Corey Fatony was outstanding as a freshman in 2015. He averaged 42.9 yards per kick; that average was 44.6 after eight games, but you could blame overuse for a late fade. But while Fatony should be a starter for three more years, the Tigers must replace longtime placekicker Andrew Baggett. Mizzou signed one of the most highly rated high schoolers in the country in Tucker McCann, but "freshman kicker" are two words that will strike fear in any fan base. Meanwhile, the return game was one of the country's worst. Does a return man emerge this year? Mizzou desperately needed field position help, and the return game provided another net loss.

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	27.1	117
DEFENSE	30.9	92
MARGIN	-3.8	110
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	30.9%	126
DEFENSE	37.9%	29
MARGIN	-7.0%	111
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	4.4	125
DEFENSE	4.3	3
MARGIN	+0.1	71
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	2.9	126
DEFENSE	3.4	8
MARGIN	-0.5	99
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	-2.2	80
ACTUAL	-1	74
MARGIN	+1.2	67

NUMBERS TO KNOW

KEY: 1-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

1.75 Nobody regressed in the red zone more than Missouri in 2015. The Tigers went from averaging 4.64 points per scoring opportunity (first downs inside the opponent's 40) to averaging 2.89. It was the largest regression in the country and the third-worst 2015 average. The Tigers were much worse at both creating and converting scoring chances and saw their win total cut in half because of it.

24.5 The most surprising aspect of Missouri's offensive regression came up front. Despite featuring five seniors in the rotation, the Tigers' offensive line couldn't get any sort of push in short yardage, and they couldn't keep defenders out of the backfield (24.5 percent of rushes were stopped at or behind the line).

8.8 Despite major youth on the defensive line, Barry Odom's Missouri defense recorded 106 tackles for a loss, sixth in the country and third in the SEC. But that number becomes even more impressive when you remember that the Tigers played in only 12 games. They averaged 8.8 TFLs per game, second in the country only to Boston College (9.5).

9 Good in the front and the back; Missouri allowed just nine gains of 30-plus yards in 2015, the fewest in the FBS. And they allowed 21 or fewer points 10 times. With national scoring averages nearing 30 points per game, that should have been enough to win at least eight or nine games. Instead, the Tigers went just 5–5 while allowing 21 or fewer points and missed a bowl.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION

Defensive Backs	4
Offensive Linemen	3
Wide Receivers	3
Defensive Linemen	2
Linebackers	2
Quarterbacks	2
Running Backs	2
Tight Ends	2
Athletes	1
Kickers	1

BY STATE

Missouri	6
Illinois	5
Arkansas	2
California	2
Georgia	2
Texas	2
Florida	1
Kansas	1
Oklahoma	1

Coming off of a disappointing 5–7 season that featured on-campus turmoil and an unexpected coaching change, Missouri's class was perhaps destined to rank near the bottom in the country's best recruiting conference. But from a needs perspective, Barry Odom and company did relatively well.

With Maty Mauk's dismissal, Mizzou needed a couple of quarterbacks, and the Tigers landed former Boise State commit Micah Wilson and big-armed junior college transfer Jack Lowary.

Running back depth was suddenly an issue, and Mizzou got a couple of four-star prospects in Nate Strong and Damarea Crockett. And the receiving corps was in need of both talent and better class distribution, so the Tigers landed junior college transfer Dominic Collins and freshmen Harry Ballard and Dimetrios Mason. Plus, they ended up with longtime Alabama commitment Brendan Scales at H-back.

Mizzou missed with some targets up front, however. The Tigers held onto in-state star Trystan Castillo and flipped East St. Louis product Tre'Vour Simms from Illinois, but thanks to decommits and a little bit of spring attrition, the staff was still scrambling for junior college options to fill the two-deep into the summer. That's never good.

On defense, Mizzou didn't need many instant-impact players but braced for future turnover with defensive backs (including Dallas product DeMarkus Acy) and linebackers such as Houston's Trey Baldwin. The Tigers also held onto the best senior in Columbia, signing defensive end Tre Williams.

This probably isn't a class that leads you to a national title, but Mizzou shored up sudden weaknesses and addressed future holes. The Tigers didn't successfully address the offensive line issues and will continue to pursue big men into the 2017 class, but Odom and his new assistants found some solid toys to put into the toy box.

SPOTLIGHT ON

TREY BALDWIN

LB • HOUSTON, TX

Sean Weatherspoon was the ultimate Gary Pinkel recruit. A low two-star prospect per Rivals, Weatherspoon was a Jasper, Texas, product committed to Houston when then-defensive coordinator Matt Eberflus picked up his scent. He flipped his commitment to the Tigers the day after Christmas 2005, signed six weeks later, and immediately carved out a role in special teams in 2006. By 2007, Weatherspoon was the charismatic anchor of an active, opportunistic defense that helped Missouri to a 12–2 record and top-five finish. By 2010, he was a first-round draft pick.

Any non-elite Texas linebacker prospect who signs with Missouri is inevitably going to be compared to 'Spoon, especially by Tigers fans, but Trey Baldwin checks more boxes than most. A product of Cypress Falls High School in Houston, Baldwin was a Rivals two-star who listed only one other power-conference offer (from Illinois). But the early enrollee made enough noise in spring practice that he is expected to play a role on, you guessed it, special teams this coming fall.

Baldwin is bigger than Weatherspoon was when he moved to Columbia, and the linebacker depth chart is a bit more crowded than it was a decade ago, not only because of seniors Donavin Newsom and Michael Scherer, but also because of high-upside youngsters Brandon Lee, Terez Hall and Franklin Agbasimere. But don't be surprised if he breaks into the rotation by 2017. He is a Mizzou legacy whether he realizes it or not.

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
DeMarkus Acy	S	6-2/183	Dallas, TX	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	905
Jerod Alton	CB	5-10/180	Kirkwood, MO	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,619
Trey Baldwin	OLB	6-2/240	Houston, TX	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	1,028
Harry Ballard	WR	6-2/180	Florissant, MO	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,307
Chris Black	WR	6-0/192	Jacksonville, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,305
Trystan Castillo	OC	6-4/295	Webb City, MO	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	965
Dominic Collins	WR	6-3/175	Fullerton, CA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	124*
Damarea Crockett	RB	5-11/212	Little Rock, AR	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	541
Cale Garrett	ILB	6-3/225	Kearney, MO	★★★	NR	★★★	★★	1,937
Christian Holmes	CB	6-1/182	Atlanta, GA	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	1,674
Tyler Howell	OT	6-8/305	Bonner Springs, KS	★★★	★★★	NR	★★★	27*
Jack Lowary	QB	6-4/215	Huntington Beach, CA	NR	NR	NR	★★	NR*
Dimetrios Mason	ATH	6-0/170	Loganville, GA	★★★	NR	★★	★★	1,446
Tucker McCann	K	6-0/185	O'Fallon, IL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,310
Albert Okwuegbunam	TE	6-5/225	Springfield, IL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	610
Brendan Scales	TE	6-4/235	Wildwood, MO	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	376
Tre'vour Simms	OT	6-5/300	East St. Louis, IL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	941
Natereace Strong	RB	6-0/211	East St. Louis, IL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	15*
Greg Taylor	S	5-10/200	East St. Louis, IL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	72*
Markell Utsey	DT	6-4/285	Little Rock, AR	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	1,678
Tre Williams	DE	6-5/235	Columbia, MO	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	532
Micah Wilson	QB	6-3/205	Tulsa, OK	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,064

*junior college transfer

SOUTH CAROLINA GAMECOCKS

National Forecast: **63** /// *SEC East Prediction:* **7**

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	at Vanderbilt
Sept. 10	at Mississippi State
Sept. 17	East Carolina
Sept. 24	at Kentucky
Oct. 1	Texas A&M
Oct. 8	Georgia
Oct. 22	Massachusetts
Oct. 29	Tennessee
Nov. 5	Missouri
Nov. 12	at Florida
Nov. 19	Western Carolina
Nov. 26	at Clemson

The Steve Spurrier Era, which included an unprecedented three 11-win seasons but ended with a 3–9 year, is over. Will Muschamp's second tour in the Southeastern Conference begins. Like Spurrier, Muschamp coached at Florida. Unlike Spurrier, he did not have a Hall of Fame career there. Muschamp was fired after the 2014 season with a four-year record of 28–21 and comes to South Carolina looking to prove himself as a head coach. He doesn't have an easy job.

The Gamecocks finished 11th in the SEC in offense last year and lost their best offensive player in wide receiver Pharoh Cooper. The defense was last in the SEC, giving up 429.8 yards per game.

DAVID WILLIAMS

QUARTERBACKS There won't be a more interesting fall quarterback competition than the one at South Carolina. The Gamecocks listed all five scholarship quarterbacks as co-starters entering spring practice, but incumbent starter Perry Orth (collarbone) and sophomore Lorenzo Nunez (knee) were unable to compete due to injuries, allowing early enrollee freshman Brandon McIlwain to emerge. McIlwain ended spring as the top available quarterback ahead of Connor Mitch and Michael Scarnecchia. However, the competition got more crowded unexpectedly when four-star prep quarterback Jake Bentley, the son of South Carolina running backs coach Bobby Bentley, verbally committed to the Gamecocks for the class of 2017 and then revealed he could graduate from high school early and enroll in college this summer. That means Bentley will be able to compete for the starting job this fall. Muschamp's tenure at Florida was derailed by poor play and poor health at quarterback, so it could be that Bentley is merely meant to be insurance against an injury to McIlwain, or it could be that the staff believed it needed to give Bentley a shot this year because it didn't see enough in the spring. Orth, who started eight games last year, and Nunez each will get a chance in the fall as well, Muschamp says.

RUNNING BACKS Junior David Williams caught Muschamp's eye midway through spring, and the staff now believes he can be an offensive workhorse. Williams, a former four-star prospect, had 86 carries for 299 yards as a backup last year, but he'll get plenty of chances this fall. Redshirt freshman A.J. Turner emerged as the second-team tailback in the spring and could give the Gamecocks a breakaway threat in the backfield that they haven't had in a while. "A.J. has top-end speed," Muschamp says. "He's very quick, but he's also a really good receiver out of the backfield. We can put him on the edge to create space. He's a tough runner that runs north to south."

RECEIVERS No offensive position causes the coaching staff more concern. Sophomore Deebo Samuel, who was limited in 2015 by injury, is the only proven playmaker at the position, and even Samuel had only 12 catches for 161 yards last season. Early enrollee freshman Bryan Edwards was listed as the other starting wide receiver, which is a good indicator of how the coaching staff feels about the rest of the veterans at the position. Junior Jamari Smith, who entered spring practice as a running back, was moved to wide receiver midway through the spring to help shore up the position, and he was one of the stars of the spring game. "He made a smooth transition, and

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 4-8, 1-7 SEC

South Carolina made the curious decision to hire a coach who had been fired by a division rival one year earlier. Will Muschamp inherits a roster that has significant concerns on both sides of the ball. Defensively, the Gamecocks return only five starters from a unit that surrendered 6.0 yards per play last season — the second-worst average in the SEC. The offense lacks a clear answer at quarterback, and there's little in the way of proven talent at the skill positions. South Carolina has signed five straight top-30 recruiting classes, so there is talent in the program. However, a tough SEC slate and the overall roster transition will make it difficult for this team to show much progress in the win column.

5-YEAR WIN TREND

Williams: AP; Moore: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

JOB ONE "If you can't recruit, you can't coach for me," Muschamp said at his introductory news conference, and then he went out and proved it. Along with hiring two of the hottest young recruiters in the country — Travaris Robinson from Auburn as his defensive coordinator and Bryan McClendon from Georgia as his wide receivers coach and co-offensive coordinator — Muschamp hired longtime South Carolina high school coach Bobby Bentley (running backs) and veteran SEC recruiters Lance Thompson (defensive line) and Pat Washington (tight ends).

BACK FOR MORE Linebacker Skai Moore, who led South Carolina in tackling in his freshman, sophomore and junior years, had decided to give up his final year of eligibility and turn pro. However, after several conversations with Muschamp, he opted to return for his senior season, and he's expected to be the team's top defender. In addition to being a top tackler, Moore needs four interceptions this year to set the school's career record in that category. He has 11 picks in his career, including three two-interception games.

ROLE REVERSAL Muschamp invited six local media members to serve as "guest coaches" for South Carolina's spring game. There were very few restrictions on the reporting, and the access to the team's meeting rooms and locker room was unlimited. While far from a fall gameday atmosphere, the opportunity did provide an interesting look into gameday mechanics. The biggest takeaway was the task of learning new offensive terminology for the quarterbacks, etc. Offensive coordinator Kurt Roper rattled through dozens of play calls that sounded almost like a foreign language during a 15-minute quarterbacks meeting.

BUILDING TIES Outreach has been one of Muschamp's top priorities. Along with speaking at local organizations and attending functions such as a retirement ceremony for high school football coaching legend John McKissick, Muschamp has made appearances on campus and even invited students to lead the team onto the field before the spring game.

LINE STABILITY After serving as interim head coach for six games after Spurrier's abrupt resignation, offensive line coach Shawn Elliott returned to the same position under Muschamp, which was good news for his veteran linemen. "It was definitely a relief," senior center Alan Knott says. "He's such a great guy. He reminds me a lot of my high school coach. He's one of the reasons I came here so definitely glad he's still here. That was definitely a tremendous thing for us."

TONE IT DOWN Muschamp's fiery demeanor was a topic of conversation during his interviews with Gamecocks athletic director Ray Tanner. "We have talked extensively about his expectations of the head coach at the University of South Carolina," Muschamp says. "I certainly am in accordance with everything he wants done. I am a passionate guy. I do have a competitive edge about me. I do coach with a lot of energy on the field, and I want our players to play with relentless effort, great energy and great passion." Tanner feels he got the message across. "I might have been a little firm, but he understands," Tanner says.

LB SKAI MOORE

he's a very intelligent young man," Muschamp says. "He's a guy that can get yards after the catch, and he's someone who can do nice things for you in space. We need to have more playmakers; we don't have too much depth." To compensate for that lack of depth (and because offensive coordinator Kurt Roper loves the tight end), South Carolina will look to tight ends Hayden Hurst and Kevin Crosby a lot.

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN The most interesting development along the offensive front during spring practice was the re-emergence of redshirt sophomore guard Donell Stanley and junior tackle D.J. Park. Both were in danger of being jumped in the rotation by a true sophomore class of linemen who showed great potential last year. Instead, both Stanley and Park were in the starting rotation in the final week of spring practice. That rotation probably will change again in the early part of the fall, but if Stanley and Park can hold onto starting spots, it would give South Carolina something it hasn't had in a while — mammoth road graders up front. Stanley is 6'3", 326 pounds and Park is 6'4", 323. The Gamecocks have some choices on the interior line, where Alan Knott and Cory Helms are battling for the center job. Zack Bailey probably has one of the guard positions sewn up, and senior Mason Zandi will start at tackle unless something crazy happens. Sophomore Blake Camper is waiting in the wings if Park can't hold onto the starting job.

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (3)

WR	1	Deebo Samuel (So.)	88	Javon Charleston (Fr.)
WR	22	Jamari Smith (Jr.)	5	Terry Googer (So.)
WR	89	Bryan Edwards (Fr.)	15	Matrick Belton (Sr.)
LT	74	**Mason Zandi (Sr.)**	69	D.J. Park (Jr.)
LG	78	Zack Bailey (So.)	51	Cory Helms (Jr.)
C	70	**Alan Knott (Jr.)**	51	Cory Helms (Jr.)
RG	51	Cory Helms (Jr.)	72	Donell Stanley (So.)
RT	69	D.J. Park (Jr.)	63	Blake Camper (So.)
TE	81	Hayden Hurst (So.)	86	Kevin Crosby (So.)
QB	11	Brandon McIlwain (Fr.)	10	**Perry Orth (Sr.)**
RB	33	David Williams (Jr.)	25	A.J. Turner (Fr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	8	**Marquavius Lewis (Sr.)**	18	Keir Thomas (Fr.)
DT	94	Kelsey Griffin (Sr.)	93	Ulric Jones (Jr.)
DT	90	Taylor Stallworth (Jr.)	99	Abu Lamin (Sr.)
BUCK	49	Boosie Whitlow (So.)	5	Darius English (Sr.)
SLB	28	Jonathan Walton (Sr.)	30	Daniel Fennell (Fr.)
MLB	10	**Skai Moore (Sr.)**	11	**T.J. Holloman (Sr.)**
WLB	4	Bryson Allen-Williams (Jr.)	23	Larenz Bryant (Sr.)
CB	16	Rashad Fenton (So.)		Jamarcus King (Jr.)
CB	3	Chris Lammons (Jr.)	1	**Rico McWilliams (Sr.)**
S	17	Chaz Elder (Sr.)	27	Toure Boyd (Jr.)
S	42	**Jordan Diggs (Sr.)**	26	Jasper Sasser (Jr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	29	Elliott Fry (Sr.)	KR	25 A.J. Turner (Fr.)
P	13	Sean Kelly (Sr.)	PR	1 Deebo Samuel (So.)

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN A big part of Muschamp's appeal was the belief that he's well suited to fix the Gamecocks defense, and he has to start up front. South Carolina's failings on the line last year were well chronicled. Ninety-ninth in the nation in sacks (20) and 102nd in tackles for a loss (64) tells the story the best. The defensive line will get a new look with the addition of Muschamp's Buck position, a defensive end/linebacker hybrid that replaces the Spur (a safety/linebacker hybrid) in the previous system. Senior Darius English (240 pounds) and sophomore Boosie Whitlow (238) were moved from traditional defensive end spots, where they struggled due to being undersized, to the Buck position. Redshirt freshman Daniel Fennell, who will also play linebacker, got some time there late in the spring. Muschamp is looking for what he calls "juice" off the edge, and that sounds like Whitlow, who had five tackles for a loss in limited action last year. Senior Marquavius Lewis will stay at the defensive end position opposite the Buck and will be expected to have a big year. After that, Muschamp will need to get big contributions from thus far underachieving linemen like Kelsey Griffin, Abu Lamin, Dexter Wideman and Ulric Jones to get a solid group up front. Early enrollees Kobe Smith and Keir Thomas could find a spot in the rotation, too.

LINEBACKERS This is the only spot on the team where Muschamp has used the words "winning football" to describe to his personnel. The Gamecocks like their linebackers. The problem will be whittling down to which ones are going to play. Senior Skai Moore, the team's leading tackler the last three seasons, missed spring practice due to a neck injury, but he'll have a starting spot waiting for him this fall. Moore had

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH Will Muschamp
RECORD AT SCHOOL First Season
CAREER RECORD 28-21 (4 years)
CO-OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS
Bryan McClendon, Kurt Roper
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Travaris Robinson
LOCATION Columbia, SC
STADIUM Williams-Brice Stadium (80,250)

KEY GAMECOCKS

DAVID WILLIAMS, RB A backup with 555 yards his first two seasons, Williams has believed he should be getting more carries, and he'll get his chance this year as the starter.

MARQUAVIUS LEWIS, DE The highly touted junior college transfer was solid but not spectacular last season, and the Gamecocks would like him to improve on last year's three sacks.

BRANDON MCILWAIN, QB Perry Orth has more experience, but McIlwain is the far more exciting prospect and could be the Gamecocks' starter when they play at Vanderbilt in Week 1.

ZACK BAILEY, G The Gamecocks need some help after struggling to hold the point of attack last year on their zone read plays and Bailey may be their most talented overall lineman.

SKAI MOORE, LB A senior who has led the team in tackles each of the last three seasons, Moore sat out spring practice due to a neck injury but will be back in the fall.

KEY LOSSES

PHAROH COOPER, WR Cooper came to South Carolina as a defensive back but left as one of the team's most dynamic pass catchers and a two-time All-SEC selection.

JERELL ADAMS, TE Adams was an enticing 6'6" target in the middle and quickly became a coveted NFL prospect.

BRANDON SHELL, OT Shell, the great nephew of NFL Hall of Famer Art Shell, started his final 47 games at South Carolina, the final 12 at left tackle.

BRANDON WILDS, RB An on-again, off-again starter, Wilds rushed for more than 100 yards three times last season.

GERALD DIXON JR., DT The Gamecocks defensive line wasn't great the last two years, but Dixon Jr. was at least a large (327 pounds) presence in the middle.

RISING STAR

Wide receiver **Deebo Samuel** will make a splash this season. The third-year sophomore was limited to 12 catches for 161 yards last year by a hamstring injury. He caught five passes for 104 yards in the finale against Clemson, and he's the only proven perimeter playmaker for the Gamecocks.

Lewis: AP; Knott: Chris Keane

2016 SOUTH CAROLINA ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
18	Gordon, Danny	6-0/200	So.	Worthington, OH
11	McIlwain, Brandon	6-0/198	Fr.	Newtown, PA
6	Mitch, Connor	6-3/198	Jr.	Raleigh, NC
19	Nuñez, Lorenzo	6-3/210	So.	Kennesaw, GA
10	Orth, Perry	6-0/196	Sr.	Ponte Vedra, FL
16	Pucci, Gage	5-11/191	Fr.	Glendora, CA
12	Scarnecchia, Michael	6-3/207	So.	Fleming Island, FL

RUNNING BACKS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
39	Bedenbaugh, Rivers	6-2/245	Jr.	Leesville, SC
34	Denson, Mon	5-10/220	Fr.	LaGrange, GA
36	Freeman, C.J.	5-11/196	Fr.	Greensboro, NC
44	Moorman, Max	5-10/230	Fr.	Alpharetta, GA
30	Paulk, Darius	5-7/195	Sr.	Columbia, SC
32	Talley, Rod	5-9/200	Jr.	Laurens, SC
25	Turner, A.J.	5-10/186	Fr.	Clifton, VA
33	Williams, David	6-1/216	Jr.	Philadelphia, PA

RECEIVERS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
15	Belton, Matrick	6-3/205	Sr.	Columbia, SC
88	Charleston, Javon	6-1/178	Fr.	Gurnee, IL
4	Christian, Jalen	5-8/176	Fr.	Damascus, MD
85	Dingle, Devin	5-10/155	Fr.	Summerville, SC
89	Edwards, Bryan	6-3/200	Fr.	Conway, SC
5	Googer, Terry	6-4/216	So.	Atlanta, GA
23	Owens, Christian	6-5/205	Fr.	Griffin, GA
1	Samuel, Deebo	6-0/205	So.	Inman, SC
22	Smith, Jamari	5-10/204	Jr.	Jacksonville, FL
9	Washington, Jerad	5-9/150	Fr.	Jacksonville, FL

TIGHT ENDS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
40	August, Jacob	6-6/251	So.	Elgin, SC
86	Crosby, Kevin	6-1/226	So.	Bamberg, SC
81	Hurst, Hayden	6-4/242	So.	Jacksonville, FL
84	Markway, Kyle	6-4/246	So.	St. Louis, MO
87	Weigel, Matthew	6-5/230	Fr.	Charlotte, NC

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
78	Bailey, Zack	6-6/326	So.	Summerville, SC
63	Camper, Blake	6-7/293	So.	Virginia Beach, VA
79	Derouen, Trey	6-3/310	Fr.	Lilburn, GA
51	Helms, Cory	6-4/303	Jr.	Alpharetta, GA
70	Knott, Alan	6-4/268	Jr.	Tyrone, GA
69	Park, D.J.	6-4/323	Jr.	Dillon, SC
55	Pellage, Christian	6-7/300	So.	Brooksville, FL
72	Stanley, Donell	6-3/326	So.	Floydale, SC
77	Young, Malik	6-4/298	So.	Pelzer, SC
74	Zandi, Mason	6-9/303	Sr.	Chapin, SC

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
91	Blackshear, Shameik	6-4/250	So.	Bluffton, SC
61	Duncan, Javion	6-0/255	So.	Simpsonville, SC
5	English, Darius	6-5/240	Sr.	Powder Springs, GA
30	Fennell, Daniel	6-2/228	Fr.	Loganville, GA
94	Griffin, Kelsey	6-2/302	Sr.	Buford, GA
93	Jones, Ulric	6-6/284	Jr.	Oxford, AL
99	Lamin, Abu	6-3/291	Sr.	Fayetteville, NC
8	Lewis, Marquavius	6-4/254	Sr.	Greenwood, SC
95	Sawyer, Dante	6-3/289	Jr.	Suwanee, GA
97	Smith, Kobe	6-3/310	Fr.	Lawrenceville, GA
90	Stallworth, Taylor	6-2/302	Jr.	Mobile, AL
18	Thomas, Keir	6-1/245	Fr.	Miami, FL
49	Whitlow, Boosie	6-3/238	So.	Opelika, AL
48	Wideman, Dexter	6-3/280	Fr.	Saluda, SC

LINEBACKERS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
4	Allen-Williams, Bryson	6-1/230	Jr.	Ellenwood, GA
23	Bryant, Larenz	6-0/208	Sr.	Charlotte, NC
42	Diggs, Jordan	6-0/211	Sr.	Fort Myers, FL
13	Dread, Jalen	5-10/214	So.	Foley, AL
44	Eason-Riddle, Spencer	5-11/231	Fr.	Raleigh, NC
11	Holloman, T.J.	6-2/226	Sr.	Stone Mountain, GA
46	Malone, Cedrick	6-0/208	Sr.	Camden, SC
10	Moore, Skai	6-2/218	Sr.	Cooper City, FL
9	Pittman, Sherrod	6-0/221	Fr.	Jacksonville, FL
41	Ragsdale, Tyler	6-1/203	Fr.	Mt. Pleasant, SC
28	Walton, Jonathan	6-0/226	Sr.	Daphne, AL

DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
27	Boyd, Toure	5-11/184	Jr.	Rancho Cucamonga, CA
17	Elder, Chaz	6-2/203	Sr.	Union City, GA
16	Fenton, Rashad	5-11/185	So.	Miami, FL
34	Grant, Scott	5-10/183	So.	Laurens, SC
14	Groves, Ali	5-10/185	Jr.	Stone Mountain, GA
35	James, Shannon	5-6/153	Sr.	Florence, SC
3	Lammons, Chris	5-10/184	Jr.	Lauderhill, FL
1	McWilliams, Rico	5-11/179	Sr.	Hampton, GA
43	Russell, Benji	5-11/183	Jr.	Atlanta, GA
26	Sasser, Jasper	6-0/204	Jr.	Jacksonville, FL
40	Senn, Jason	5-8/186	Fr.	Beaufort, SC
25	Smalls, Darin	5-11/185	Fr.	Summerville, SC
39	Smalls, Demetrius	5-8/170	Jr.	Bluffton, SC
31	Smith, Chris	5-10/168	Fr.	Rock Hill, SC
24	Smith, D.J.	5-11/185	Jr.	Marietta, GA
15	Wilder, Antoine	5-10/187	Fr.	Riverdale, GA

SPECIALISTS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
85	Almond, Michael (K)	6-3/215	Fr.	North Augusta, SC
45	Asbury, Ben (LS)	5-10/204	So.	Atlanta, GA
20	Charlton, Joseph (P)	6-5/180	Fr.	Columbia, SC
87	Cormier, Brady (K)	5-10/172	Fr.	Beaufort, SC
59	Crane, Logan (LS)	6-3/224	Fr.	Dartmouth, MA
29	Fry, Elliott (K)	6-0/165	Sr.	Frisco, TX
46	Huechtker, Jakob (LS)	5-6/193	Jr.	Rock Hill, SC
13	Kelly, Sean (P)	5-10/195	Sr.	Oakland, FL
48	McGriff, Nick (LS)	6-0/221	So.	Gainesville, FL
47	Williams, Drew (LS)	6-1/202	Sr.	Irmo, SC

Scouting the GAMECOCKS

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP SOUTH CAROLINA

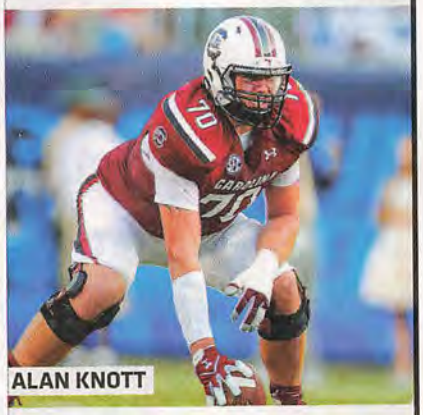
"I don't believe they're as bad as they looked last year, but I think the new staff realizes they've got a lot of work ahead of them and they're going to have to go recruit some dudes to get South Carolina back to the level [Steve] Spurrier had it a few years ago. I do think they'll be a tougher team than you saw on tape last year. Will Muschamp will help them get there because he'll get those guys to buy in or they won't stick around.... It's hard to know who's going to start at quarterback. Perry Orth was playing pretty well before he broke his collarbone and Brandon McIlwain has a lot of natural ability. I think they've got some big questions up front. ... Losing Mike Matulis and Brandon Shell will really hurt their depth. ... Deebo Samuel is a special player, but they have to figure out how to get him the ball. He was overshadowed by Pharoh Cooper, but he's the next guy for them who can play that role. I just think overall their skill set depth isn't great. I like what I've seen from David Williams at running back, and he's physically durable enough to help them in their protection scheme. ... Defensively, their scheme made no sense because it put their linebackers in coverage way more than they could handle. Muschamp will go in there and give their guys a plan they can actually execute, but you've got to have corners who can play man-to-man in his scheme to make it work. That will be key for them if those guys can step up and whether they can tackle better."

2015 RESULTS

RECORD: 3-9, 1-7 (SEC)

Sept.	3	vs. North Carolina #	W	17-13
Sept.	12	Kentucky	L	22-26
Sept.	19	at Georgia	L	20-52
Sept.	26	UCF	W	31-14
Oct.	3	at Missouri	L	10-24
Oct.	10	at LSU	L	24-45
Oct.	17	Vanderbilt	W	19-10
Oct.	31	at Texas A&M	L	28-35
Nov.	7	at Tennessee	L	24-27
Nov.	14	Florida	L	14-24
Nov.	21	The Citadel	L	22-23
Nov.	28	Clemson	L	32-37

#Charlotte



ALAN KNOTT

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Perry Orth	**261**	**143**	**1,929**	**12**	**9**
Lorenzo Nunez	**52**	**32**	**376**	**3**	**3**

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Brandon Wilds	123	567	4.6	3
Lorenzo Nunez	**59**	**375**	**6.4**	**2**
David Williams	**86**	**299**	**3.5**	**0**
Shon Carson	52	297	5.7	2

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Pharoh Cooper	66	973	14.7	8
Jerell Adams	28	421	15.0	3
Brandon Wilds	17	142	8.4	0
Deebo Samuel	**12**	**161**	**13.4**	**1**

KICKING: **Elliott Fry, 20-28 FGs, 25-25 XPs, 85 points**

TACKLES: **Skai Moore, 111**; Isaiah Johnson, 74

SACKS: **Darius English, 4.5**

INTERCEPTIONS: **Skai Moore, 4**

Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	21.9 ppg	12	110
Rushing	154.7 ypg	10	88
Passing	207.5 ypg	7	84
Total	362.2 ypg	11	99

DEFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	27.5 ppg	14	71
Rushing	217.4 ypg	14	110
Passing	212.4 ypg	9	50
Total	429.8 ypg	14	95

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
+5	+0.42	6	32

DEEBO SAMUELS

111 tackles last year and was named second-team All-SEC. He is the first player to lead South Carolina in tackles in three straight seasons since Tony Watkins (1992-94), and he could be the first player ever to lead the Gamecocks in four straight seasons. With Moore at one spot, that leaves some decisions for the coaching staff at the other positions. Bryson Allen-Williams probably locked up one of the other starting spots with an impressive spring. Allen-Williams is a junior who was a coveted recruit two years ago but has yet to make a major impact at South Carolina, in part because of having to play out of position on the defensive line at times in his career. T.J. Holloman, Jonathan Walton and Larenz Bryant also showed flashes this spring. "I think we've made some strides," Muschamp says. "We have a good combination of guys."

DEFENSIVE BACKS The list of defensive backs whom coaches are fired up about is short. Sophomore Rashad Fenton is a Miami native who seems to have one cornerback spot locked down. Muschamp hasn't been shy since his arrival in saying the secondary needs to improve, and that could happen when junior college transfer Jamarcus King arrives for fall practice. Veterans Rico McWilliams and Chris Lammons also are competing for work there. At safety, the position Muschamp coaches in practices, Chaz Elder, Toure Boyd, Jasper Sasser and D.J. Smith have all gotten looks this spring. Elder, a former four-star prospect who has arrived at his senior season without much production to show for it, is the most intriguing prospect there. "It is what it is, and we just need to continue to coach the guys. We need to become tougher on the perimeter," Muschamp says. "We need more playmakers back there and to get guys with a little more attitude back there."

SPECIALISTS There's virtually no drama here. Senior Elliott Fry, a former walk-on, will handle field goals and extra points for the fourth consecutive year. Senior Sean Kelly will be the punter (and looked very good near the end of spring practice), and senior Drew Williams will be the long-snapper, giving the Gamecocks one of the most experienced trios in the nation. The only question is who will be returning kickoffs and punts. Samuel is a valuable offensive weapon and could handle punts just to give South Carolina another chance to get the ball in his hands. Turner, Fenton and Lammons are candidates at kickoff returns, and the Gamecocks likely will give a few freshmen a chance in the fall.

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	29.9	62
DEFENSE	27.6	23
MARGIN	+2.3	42
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	38.0%	105
DEFENSE	46.0%	107
MARGIN	-8.0%	114
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	5.6	66
DEFENSE	6.0	98
MARGIN	-0.4	90
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	4.0	105
DEFENSE	5.0	117
MARGIN	-1.0	119
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	-1.9	76
ACTUAL	5	32
MARGIN	+6.9	19

NUMBERS TO KNOW

KEY: 1-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

5.05 South Carolina allowed a disturbing 5.05 points per scoring opportunity (first downs inside the opponent's 40) in 2015, 117th in the country and dead last in the SEC. The defense was shaky overall (the Gamecocks allowed 6.0 yards per play, 98th in FBS), but it got worse when the goal line was in sight.

4.3 To address a lack of playmaking on the defensive front, Steve Spurrier signed three junior college defensive linemen and five total junior college defenders in his 2015 recruiting class. Did it help? Not really. South Carolina still made stops at or behind the line on only 15.7 percent of opponent rushes (108th in FBS) and sacked the quarterback only 4.3 percent of the time on passing downs (second-and-8 or more, third-and-5 or more, fourth-and-5 or more), 115th.

7.8 Lorenzo Nunez and Perry Orth took a lot of sacks and threw too many picks in a mistake-filled 2015. But both quarterbacks showcased strong mobility, something new offensive coordinator Kurt Roper might be able to utilize: Not including sacks, Nunez rushed 54 times for 423 yards (7.8 per carry), while Orth rushed 36 times for 231 (6.4).

60.5 Of the 38 fumbles that took place in South Carolina games in 2015, the Gamecocks recovered 23 of them. That 60.5 percent fumble recovery rate was the ninth-highest in the country. Over time, every team's recovery rate gravitates toward 50 percent, so this is typically a sign of good luck. The season could have been even worse.

Tami Chappell

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION

Defensive Linemen	7
Wide Receivers	5
Offensive Linemen	4
Defensive Backs	2
Quarterbacks	2
Running Backs	2
Tight Ends	2
Linebackers	1

BY STATE

Georgia	6
Alabama	4
North Carolina	4
South Carolina	4
Florida	3
Tennessee	2
Alabama	1
Pennsylvania	1

South Carolina's overall talent base slipped in Steve Spurrier's final two seasons, and it's going to take some time for the new staff to rebuild the roster.

Will Muschamp wasted no time getting started. He left his introductory news conference and drove to local Richland Northeast High School, where he met with linebacker T.J. Brunson, who at the time was committed to Louisville. Brunson ended up signing with the Gamecocks, who brought in 15 offensive players and 10 defensive players.

The class was ranked eighth in the SEC by the 247Sports Composite rankings — but 24th nationally. The star of the class is quarterback Brandon McIlwain, a four-star, dual-threat prospect who enrolled early in order to compete for the starting job. The Gamecocks also signed five wide receivers to help bolster their offense.

To address the biggest defensive trouble spot, South Carolina signed seven defensive linemen.

The players who figure to contribute immediately are McIlwain, wide receivers Bryan Edwards and Kiel Pollard, running back Rico Dowdle and cornerback Jamarcus King (a junior college transfer). The class featured only four players from South Carolina. The Gamecocks signed as many from North Carolina and more (six) from Georgia.

A sure sign of Muschamp's impatience with reworking his roster was the fact that he brought a school-record six early enrollees in time for spring practice. McIlwain, Edwards, Thomas, running back C.J. Freeman, defensive back Chris Smith and defensive lineman Kobe Smith all participated in spring practice, and Muschamp has indicated that he will try to get as many of his team's signees to enroll early as he can in the future.

"There's no doubt in my mind it's the best thing for the student-athlete," he says, citing the more relaxed transition into college academics.

SPOTLIGHT ON

BRANDON MCILWAIN

QB • NEWTOWN, PA

Quarterback Brandon McIlwain was the prize verbal commit of the previous coaching staff, and when Steve Spurrier resigned and quarterbacks coach G.A. Mangus was not retained, there was the question of whether he would ever arrive on campus. That question was particularly worrisome for South Carolina fans, because McIlwain was projected to be an early-round selection in the Major League Baseball draft. Everyone in Columbia breathed a sigh of relief when McIlwain graduated from high school early and enrolled at USC in January. McIlwain immediately joined the baseball team, although he did not earn a big role in part because his first obligation came to the football team. McIlwain, who has not been made available to speak to the media since the beginning of spring football practice, quickly moved to the top of the spring practice quarterback depth chart after Perry Orth's injury.

McIlwain still has to compete for the starting spot, but he'll enter fall practice as the favorite. The Newtown, Pa., native threw for 1,720 yards and rushed for another 1,545 yards during his senior year of high school. He totaled 49 touchdowns that season and was named his state's Gatorade Player of the Year. An Elite 11 participant, he had more than 10,000 yards and 124 touchdowns in his high school career. He was considered the No. 2 dual-threat prospect in the country by 247Sports and chose the Gamecocks in part because his father Roddy is a South Carolina graduate.

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
Korey Banks Jr.	WR	5-11/173	Tyrone, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	792
Jake Bentley	QB	6-3/219	Opelika, AL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	198
T.J. Brunson	ILB	6-1/225	Columbia, SC	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	848
Akeem Cooperwood	OT	6-7/359	Knoxville, TN	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	83*
Randrecous Davis	WR	5-10/173	Atlanta, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	419
Chavis Dawkins	WR	6-2/200	Duncan, SC	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	944
Rico Dowdle	RB	5-11/208	Asheville, NC	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	460
Bryan Edwards	WR	6-3/200	Conway, SC	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	170
C.J. Freeman	RB	5-11/196	Greensboro, NC	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	589
Griffin Gentry	DE	6-1/246	Birmingham, AL	★★	★★★	★★	★★	2,394
Evan Hinson	TE	6-4/228	Deltona, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	617
Sadarius Hutcherson	OL	6-4/230	Huntingdon, TN	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	798
Jamarcus King	CB	6-1/170	Mobile, AL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	13*
Pete Leota	OT	6-5/305	Asheville, NC	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	1,214
Brandon McIlwain	QB	6-0/198	Newtown, PA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	229
Kiel Pollard	WR	6-0/232	Moultrie, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	417
Will Putnam	OT	6-5/282	Harrisburg, NC	★★★	★★	★★	★★★	1,931
Chris Smith	CB	5-10/168	Rock Hill, SC	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	1,503
Kobe Smith	DT	6-3/295	Lawrenceville, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	614
Stephon Taylor	DT	6-4/285	New Orleans, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	295
Keir Thomas	DE	6-1/245	Miami, FL	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	414
Aaron Thompson	DE	6-3/269	Fort Lauderdale, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	653
Robert Tucker Jr.	TE	6-3/238	Atlanta, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	948
Darius Whitfield	DE	6-2/281	Mobile, AL	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	522
Dennis Wonnum Jr.	DE	6-5/227	Stone Mountain, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,264

*junior college transfer

TENNESSEE VOLUNTEERS

National Forecast: **7** /// *SEC East Prediction:* **1**

As Butch Jones has tried his hand at resurrecting the Tennessee program, the refrain that this upcoming season "feels like '98" has been a popular one among Volunteers fans. At long last, the motto — a reference to the school's last national and conference championship season — doesn't seem that far-fetched. The rebuilding job seems to be complete for Jones, who is entering his fourth year, and the Vols are being looked at as sleepers to make the College Football Playoff.

For the second straight year, though, there's been an offseason coordinator change. The hiring of former Penn State defensive coordinator Bob Shoop in January brought a proven defensive mind to Knoxville, one that's familiar with the region's recruiting from a previous stop at Vanderbilt.

Aside from Shoop replacing John Jancek, there's been plenty of continuity for Tennessee, which brings back all but a few starters.

Late-game drama cost Tennessee a spot in the SEC title game in 2015. This year, the Vols will be expected to win those tight games and look consistently like the traditional power fans recall fondly and caught glimpses of last season.

QUARTERBACKS The X-factor for Tennessee this season will be whether Josh Dobbs finally develops into a masterful downfield passer to match the boost that he gives the Vols with his running ability. The brainiac quarterback relies on swing and screen passes but hasn't yet consistently shown that he can hit downfield targets. By favoring the safer throws, Dobbs, who won the job midway through the 2014 season, has significantly cut down on his mistakes. Even if he finishes his Tennessee career without adding the deep ball to his repertoire, teams routinely struggle to bring him down in the open field, making him a guaranteed net positive on the offense. But if Dobbs does grow as a passer, it doesn't seem like a stretch to say that the Vols can contend for a CFB Playoff spot. Dobbs will also need to pick his spots to take off and run and keep himself out of harm's way. Behind Dobbs, sophomore Quinten Dormady filled out his frame this offseason and likely has the stronger arm of the two. There's also Sheriron Jones, who transferred to Colorado this offseason before returning to Knoxville only two weeks later. Jones missed the majority of spring practice and enters the season behind Dormady in the race for the snaps Dobbs doesn't get.

RUNNING BACKS Tennessee is set at this position; the Vols' abundance of talent here is a big reason why they are a popular pick to win the division. Junior Jalen Hurd needs 892 yards this season to become the program's all-time leading rusher. Considering that he accumulated nearly 1,300 yards a season ago, Hurd seems to be a shoo-in for the record, barring injury. For Hurd, an in-state player whom Jones kept from outside suitors, this season might be his last to show that Tennessee is back to national prominence before the NFL beckons. He's a powerful runner who often looks like the aggressor when running, and he possesses a devastating stiff arm to boot. Hurd also moves surprisingly well for his 6'4", 240-pound frame. Alvin Kamara turned down a crack at the draft for another season in the backfield with Hurd. Kamara, a former Alabama back,

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	Appalachian State
Sept. 10	vs. Virginia Tech #
Sept. 17	Ohio
Sept. 24	Florida
Oct. 1	at Georgia
Oct. 8	at Texas A&M
Oct. 15	Alabama
Oct. 29	at South Carolina
Nov. 5	Tennessee Tech
Nov. 12	Kentucky
Nov. 19	Missouri
Nov. 26	at Vanderbilt

#Bristol, TN

DEREK BARNETT

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 10-3, 6-2 SEC

Tennessee enters 2016 as the unquestioned favorite in the East. The Volunteers return 18 starters, and the overall talent in the program has improved with three consecutive top-15 signing classes. Additionally, the hire of coordinator Bob Shoop should bring significant improvement to a defense that allowed 5.2 yards per play last year (eighth in the SEC). Quarterback Joshua Dobbs and running backs Jalen Hurd and Alvin Kamara lead a potent ground attack. However, more is needed out of Dobbs and the Tennessee receivers in the passing game after only five plays of 40 yards or more in 2015. If the passing attack improves, the pieces are in place for Tennessee to push for 10 (or more) wins in 2016. **Postseason: Sugar Bowl vs. Oklahoma**

5-YEAR WIN TREND

Barnett: Tom DiPace; Reeves-Maybin: AP

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

ON THE DIAMOND Quarterback Josh Dobbs tried his hand at becoming a two-sport college athlete this offseason, working with the Tennessee baseball team in the free time he had between football and his coursework as an aerospace engineering major. Dobbs got Butch Jones' permission to practice baseball but ultimately decided to focus on football.

BATTLE AT BRISTOL In Week 2, Tennessee will play Virginia Tech at Bristol Motor Speedway in what is being billed as "College Football's Biggest Ever." In advance of the game, the racetrack is installing a screen named "Colossus" that is comprised of four 30-by-63-foot TV monitors.

WELCOME BACK Sheriron Jones entered a crowded quarterback situation when he signed with Tennessee in 2015. He came in with gunslinging Texan Quinten Dormady, and both were behind Josh Dobbs on the depth chart. Jones decided to transfer to Colorado after failing to see the field as a freshman but took advantage of an NCAA rule that allows transfers 14 days to return to their original school.

25 POINTS Jones' theme for Tennessee's offseason was "25 points," or the combined point differential in the Vols' five most recent losses, dating back to 2014. "We are searching for those 25 points in everything that we do," Jones says. "Those 25 points are everywhere, but they are the hardest to score."

RUN-FIRST OFFENSE While there was an emphasis on the passing game this offseason, there's no question that Tennessee will run the ball a majority of downs this season. In 2015, Mike DeBord's first season as offensive coordinator, 63 percent of play calls were runs.

COACHING FAMILY FEUD Jones got involved in a Twitter tussle with Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh this spring. Jones joined in on a joke with Arkansas' Bret Bielema and Michigan State's Mark Dantonio about crashing Harbaugh's open practices in Florida. Harbaugh didn't take kindly to the humor at his expense, firing back at Jones and telling him to worry about his own program. This offseason, Tennessee dealt with the fallout from a Title IX lawsuit filed against the university that includes specific allegations against the athletics department and football program.

ACTIVIST ATHLETES When a debate regarding the use of state funding for diversity efforts on campus became controversial this spring, several Vols, including Alvin Kamara and Jalen Reeves-Maybin, decided to use their unique platform to be heard. They joined a student protest at a Tennessee men's basketball game in March, holding signs that declared "#MyDiversityMatters." The protest was "something that was important to me," Kamara says.

MAKE ROOM FOR CROOM Jason Croom and Jones worked together on a plan to move the tall receiver to tight end. Croom's size could be an asset at that position, though he first needs to show he can stay healthy; injuries have been the story of his college career thus far. DeBord says he sees Croom as a "mismatch" at tight end.

LB JALEN
REEVES-MAYBIN

T has proven that he is an SEC-caliber talent and a capable pass catcher as well. Kamara averaged 6.5 yards on his 107 rushing attempts and caught 34 passes for 291 yards in his first season in Knoxville. There's no reason to believe that the two won't form one of the sport's most productive running back duos this season. The Vols' passing game is unproven, but the running backs are explosive enough to power the offense once again.

RECEIVERS The Vols have playmakers at receiver, but it's hard to expect consistency out of this group. For only the second time in the past seven years, Tennessee didn't have a 500-yard receiver in 2014. But perhaps one junior college transfer, 6'6" Jeff George, can help fill the void left by another, Von Pearson, who led the team in receiving in his final season. The Vols will also rely on veterans Josh Smith and Josh Malone, hoping that an offseason of work has boosted the overall chemistry with Dobbs. Sophomore Preston Williams, whom Jones says has made "tremendous strides," could be in store for a breakout year and has the speed to become Dobbs' favorite target. Ethan Wolf, who averaged 13.1 yards per catch last season, and former receiver Jason Croom both have the ability to make plays at tight end. But all of the pass catchers need to show that they can routinely beat press coverage before very much can be expected.

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (9)					
WR	25	**Josh Smith (Jr.)**		Marquez Callaway (Fr.)	
WR	3	**Josh Malone (Jr.)**	19	Jeff George (Jr.)	
WR	15	Jauan Jennings (So.)	7	Preston Williams (So.)	
LT	51	Drew Richmond (Fr.)	74	Dontavius Blair (Sr.)	
LG	75	**Jashon Robertson (Jr.)**	60	Austin Sanders (Jr.)	
C	55	**Coleman Thomas (Jr.)**	64	Ray Raulerson (So.)	
RG	71	**Dylan Wiesman (Sr.)**	66	Jack Jones (So.)	
RT	63	Brett Kendrick (Jr.)	**76**	**Chance Hall (So.)**	
TE	82	**Ethan Wolf (Jr.)**	18	Jason Croom (Sr.)	
QB	11	**Joshua Dobbs (Sr.)**	12	Quinten Dormady (So.)	
RB	1	**Jalen Hurd (Jr.)**	6	Alvin Kamara (Jr.)	
DEFENSE (9)					
DE	9	**Derek Barnett (Jr.)**	4	LaTroy Lewis (Sr.)	
DT	1	Kahlil McKenzie (So.)	95	Danny O'Brien (Sr.)	
DT	39	**Kendal Vickers (Jr.)**	2	Shy Tuttle (So.)	
DE	50	**Corey Vereen (Sr.)**		Jonathan Kongbo (So.)	
LB	21	**Jalen Reeves-Maybin (Sr.)**	14	Quart'e Sapp (So.)	
LB	34	**Darrin Kirkland Jr. (So.)**	53	Colton Jumper (Jr.)	
LB	20	Cortez McDowell (Jr.)	51	Kenny Bynum (Sr.)	
CB	23	**Cameron Sutton (Sr.)**	**13**	**Malik Foreman (Sr.)**	
CB	8	**Justin Martin (Jr.)**	**12**	**Emmanuel Moseley (Jr.)**	
S	29	Evan Berry (Jr.)	22	Micah Abernathy (So.)	
S	6	Todd Kelly Jr. (Jr.)	26	Stephen Griffin (So.)	
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	25	Aaron Medley (Jr.)	KR	29 Evan Berry (Jr.)	
P	93	Trevor Daniel (Jr.)	PR	23 Cameron Sutton (Sr.)	

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN Last offseason's biggest area of concern is no longer such a cause for consternation among Vols fans. From 2014 to 2015, the line cut its sacks allowed from a whopping 43 to a manageable 24. Left tackle and unit leader Kyler Kerbyson is gone, and that's a difficult piece to replace, but Drew Richmond seems eager to help fill his spot at left tackle after redshirting as a freshman. With four starters back up front, there's no reason to expect regression from this group, which is helped by Dobbs' mobility and the team's loaded backfield. One key will be the health of guard Jashon Robertson, who is perhaps the interior line's greatest asset when he's pain-free, which wasn't the case often enough last year. If Robertson can stay in the lineup the whole year, the offensive line should again improve.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN It's going to be a tale of two groups here for Tennessee: the outside and inside. On the edges, the Vols appear to be in an enviable position. Though Curt Maggitt has moved on, Derek Barnett has emerged as one of the best pass rushers in the conference, if not the country. Teams will have their hands full trying to keep Barnett out of the backfield, where he rarely fails to finish a play. On the other side of the line, Corey Vereen is experienced and will want to close out his Tennessee career in a big way. Things are a bit dicier at tackle, though. There's the 6'3", 344-pound Kahlil McKenzie, who is facing expectations as big as he is. Kendal Vickers is one of the more experienced options, but depth could become an issue. Overall, Tennessee has to like the talent it has stockpiled along the defensive line, though a few more bodies would do it some good.

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH
Butch Jones

RECORD AT SCHOOL
21-17 (3 years)

CAREER RECORD
71-44 (9 years)

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Mike DeBord

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Bob Shoop

LOCATION
Knoxville, TN

STADIUM
Neyland Stadium (102,455)

KEY VOLUNTEERS

JALEN HURD, RB Took a massive leap forward between freshman and sophomore years and could be considered a dark horse Heisman Trophy contender.

JALEN REEVES-MAYBIN, LB The heart and soul of the Tennessee defense and one of the best in the conference at his position.

EVAN BERRY, KR Brother of Kansas City Chiefs safety Eric was named an All-American last season after leading the nation in kickoff return average.

JOSHUA DOBBS, QB Has the ability to change plays and games with his legs but needs to become a more accurate passer and avoid mistakes in critical situations.

CAMERON SUTTON, CB Put the NFL on hold for a year to help the Vols keep the core of their 2015 defense together. Has never missed a start in his college career.

KEY LOSSES

CURT MAGGITT, DE/LB Injuries plagued his college career, but he was a prolific pass rusher when healthy. Vols will need to replace his emotional presence as well.

KYLER KERBYSON, OL While protecting the blind side, played a big role in the line's transformation from comical to competent.

BRIAN RANDOLPH, S Three-year starter will be difficult to replace because of his toughness and athleticism. Second on the team in tackles in 2015 with 70.

VON PEARSON, WR Replacing Pearson is a daunting task for a receiving corps that was already thin on proven talent.

LADARRELL MCNEIL, S Once feared lost for the season, the four-year starter returned quickly from injury last fall to finish second on the team in interceptions.

RISING STAR

Vols fans will finally get a glimpse of offensive tackle **Drew Richmond** after a redshirt season. The Memphis native admits he wasn't ready as a true freshman, saying his football IQ wasn't high enough. "Total improvement on everything, from size and strength to mental endurance," Butch Jones says.

Tom DiPace

2016 TENNESSEE ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
11 Dobbs, Joshua	6-3/207	Sr.	Alpharetta, GA
12 Dormady, Quinten	6-4/216	So.	Boerne, TX
14 Jancek, Zac	6-4/214	Fr.	Knoxville, TN
13 Jones, Sheriron	6-2/208	So.	Perris, CA

RUNNING BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
1 Hurd, Jalen	6-4/240	Jr.	Hendersonville, TN
6 Kamara, Alvin	5-10/215	Jr.	Norcross, GA
4 Kelly, John	5-9/212	So.	Detroit, MI
37 Sparks, Jayson	5-7/187	Jr.	Loganville, GA
21 Young, Joe	5-11/200	So.	Winnsboro, SC

RECEIVERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
83 Blanc, Cody	6-2/206	Sr.	Knoxville, TN
87 Fetzner, Logan	5-9/182	Jr.	Cleveland, TN
19 George, Jeff	6-6/190	Jr.	Leavenworth, KS
15 Jennings, Jauan	6-3/201	So.	Murfreesboro, TN
24 Lacey, Michael	5-7/173	Fr.	Nashville, TN
3 Malone, Josh	6-3/197	Jr.	Gallatin, TN
28 Martinez, Will	5-8/184	Jr.	Knoxville, TN
85 Orradre, Thomas	6-2/180	So.	San Luis Obispo, CA
10 Perry, Vincent	5-10/175	Fr.	Nashville, TN
38 Rochell, Jaye	6-2/210	Sr.	Duluth, GA
25 Smith, Josh	6-1/216	Jr.	Knoxville, TN
7 Williams, Preston	6-4/209	So.	Hampton, GA

TIGHT ENDS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
88 Creamer, Neiko	6-3/233	So.	Wilmington, DE
18 Croom, Jason	6-5/246	Sr.	Norcross, GA
44 Johnson, Jakob	6-3/240	Jr.	Stuttgart, Germany
89 Jumper, Will	6-2/206	Fr.	Lookout Mountain, TN
47 Stocstill, Joe	6-2/234	Sr.	Lewisburg, TN
80 Wolf, Eli	6-4/216	Fr.	Minster, OH
82 Wolf, Ethan	6-6/245	Jr.	Minster, OH

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
58 Adams, Aaron	6-4/290	Jr.	Gray, TN
74 Blair, Dontavius	6-7/294	Sr.	Anniston, AL
50 Boulware, Venzell	6-3/306	Fr.	Union City, GA
79 Edwards, Thomas	6-4/315	Jr.	Kingsport, TN
76 Hall, Chance	6-4/318	So.	Roanoke, VA
66 Jones, Jack	6-4/307	So.	Murfreesboro, TN
65 Keaton, Clay	6-6/297	Fr.	Knoxville, TN
67 Keeler, Joe	6-6/275	Fr.	Arden, NC
63 Kendrick, Brett	6-6/318	Jr.	Knoxville, TN
78 Mosley, Charles	6-4/348	So.	Brighton, TN
64 Raulerson, Ray	6-4/287	So.	Tampa, FL
69 Reynolds, Jonathan	6-3/270	Jr.	Smyrna, TN
51 Richmond, Drew	6-5/301	Fr.	Memphis, TN
75 Robertson, Jashon	6-3/315	Jr.	Nashville, TN
60 Sanders, Austin	6-5/318	Jr.	Cleveland, TN
55 Thomas, Coleman	6-5/301	Jr.	Max Meadows, VA
71 Wiesman, Dylan	6-4/304	Sr.	Cincinnati, OH

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
97 Bain, Paul	6-5/290	So.	Powder Springs, GA
9 Barnett, Derek	6-3/257	Jr.	Nashville, TN
52 Butcher, Andrew	6-2/257	Fr.	Alpharetta, GA
90 Folger, Charles	6-4/249	Sr.	Augusta, GA
4 Lewis, LaTroy	6-4/256	Sr.	Akron, OH
1 McKenzie, Kahlil	6-3/344	So.	Walnut Creek, CA
40 Mixon, Dimarya	6-4/259	Jr.	Compton, CA
95 O'Brien, Danny	6-2/301	Sr.	Flint, MI
5 Phillips, Kyle	6-4/259	So.	Nashville, TN
55 Picou, Quay	6-1/266	So.	Sugar Hill, GA
94 Stokes, Tyler	6-1/274	So.	Knoxville, TN
19 Taylor, Darrell	6-4/230	Fr.	Waverly, VA
2 Tuttle, Shy	6-2/311	So.	Midway, NC
50 Vereen, Corey	6-2/249	Sr.	Winter Garden, FL
39 Vickers, Kendal	6-3/286	Jr.	Havelock, NC

LINEBACKERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
43 Bates, Ben	5-11/195	Jr.	Pulaski, TN
17 Bates, Dillon	6-3/228	So.	Ponte Vedra Beach, FL
41 Berry, Elliott	5-11/222	Jr.	Fairburn, GA
36 Bryant, Gavin	6-0/238	So.	Jackson, AL
51 Bynum, Kenny	6-1/227	Sr.	Jacksonville, FL
53 Jumper, Colton	6-2/224	Jr.	Lookout Mountain, TN
34 Kirkland Jr., Darrin	6-1/224	So.	Indianapolis, IN
47 Knoll, Landon	6-3/217	Fr.	Nashville, TN
48 Maddox, DaJour	5-11/210	Fr.	Stone Mountain, GA
20 McDowell, Cortez	6-0/240	Jr.	Locust Grove, GA
21 Reeves-Maybin, Jalen	6-0/225	Sr.	Clarksville, TN
14 Sapp, Quart'e	6-2/214	So.	Alpharetta, GA
11 Smith, Austin	6-3/236	So.	Buford, GA

DEFENSIVE BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
22 Abernathy, Micah	6-0/193	So.	Atlanta, GA
29 Berry, Evan	5-11/207	Jr.	Fairburn, GA
13 Foreman, Malik	5-10/178	Sr.	Kingsport, TN
35 Gatewood, MaLeik	5-10/189	Fr.	Memphis, TN
7 Gaulden, Rashaan	6-1/178	So.	Spring Hill, TN
26 Griffin, Stephen	6-2/200	So.	Charlotte, NC
10 Henderson, D.J.	6-1/180	Jr.	Lyman, SC
6 Kelly Jr., Todd	5-11/208	Jr.	Knoxville, TN
8 Martin, Justin	6-1/183	Jr.	Antioch, TN
24 Miller, Darrell	5-10/178	So.	Cedar Hill, TX
12 Moseley, Emmanuel	5-11/179	Jr.	Greensboro, NC
3 Osborne, Marquill	5-11/183	Fr.	Cornelius, NC
23 Sutton, Cameron	5-11/186	Sr.	Jonesboro, GA
30 Williams, Devin	5-8/184	Sr.	Knoxville, TN

SPECIALISTS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
53 Bradshaw, Will (LS)	6-4/219	Jr.	Dyersburg, TN
93 Daniel, Trevor (P)	6-1/248	Jr.	Dickson, TN
30 Foster, Holden (K)	6-0/180	Jr.	Dickson, TN
31 Henry, Parker (H)	6-1/170	So.	Hendersonville, TN
39 Jones, Alex (K)	5-5/139	Fr.	Knoxville, TN
46 Lovingood, Riley (LS)	6-0/209	Fr.	Hendersonville, TN
52 Medford, Elijah (LS)	5-9/222	So.	Burlington, NC
25 Medley, Aaron (K)	6-2/189	Jr.	Lewisburg, TN
43 Toser, Laszlo (K)	5-8/181	Fr.	Ooltewah, TN
27 Townsend, Tommy (P)	6-1/195	Fr.	Orlando, FL

Scouting the VOLUNTEERS

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP TENNESSEE

"A lot of us thought they were on the brink of being really good. Like, really close. It's probably a make-or-break year for Butch [Jones], especially with some of the off-the-field stuff they've been dealing with. I would think the expectation for them should be to win the East, but they have to get over the mental hurdle of beating Florida. They don't really have any excuses. They've been the better team the last two years and haven't gotten it done. ... Schematically, they do a good job of attacking you. They do some really unique stuff with their offensive line, pulling both guards opposite directions, stuff you don't see week-in and week-out.... I don't know with [Joshua] Dobbs. In my mind, he's the one question they have offensively. He's probably not as good as people make him out to be, but he does a solid job in their system. Jalen Hurd is terrific and the other guy, Alvin Kamara, I thought he was strong as well. ... They're just OK at wideout, nothing special, but they get a lot of production out of their tight ends. ... The offensive line is schematically good but not as strong. ... I think on defense they will move up significantly with Bob Shoop. He's one of the best in the country, and he does such a great job teaching his system. They've got it down. ... Getting Cam Sutton back was huge because he's just so good in coverage; your guy really has to make a great throw to beat him. Their safeties have played a lot of football, so I think they're as solid on the back end as anyone."

2015 RESULTS

RECORD: 9-4, 5-3 (SEC)

Sept.	5	vs. Bowling Green %	W	59-30
Sept.	12	Oklahoma (ot)	L	24-31
Sept.	19	Western Carolina	W	55-10
Sept.	26	at Florida	L	27-28
Oct.	3	Arkansas	L	20-24
Oct.	10	Georgia	W	38-31
Oct.	24	at Alabama	L	14-19
Oct.	31	at Kentucky	W	52-21
Nov.	7	South Carolina	W	27-24
Nov.	14	North Texas	W	24-0
Nov.	21	at Missouri	W	19-8
Nov.	28	Vanderbilt	W	53-28
Jan.	1	vs. Northwestern #	W	45-6

%Nashville #Outback Bowl

JOSHUA DOBBS

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Joshua Dobbs	**344**	**205**	**2,291**	**15**	**5**
Quinten Dormady	**22**	**13**	**209**	**1**	**0**

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Jalen Hurd	**277**	**1,288**	**4.6**	**12**
Alvin Kamara	**107**	**698**	**6.5**	**7**
Joshua Dobbs	**146**	**671**	**4.6**	**11**

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Von Pearson	38	409	10.8	3
Alvin Kamara	**34**	**291**	**8.6**	**3**
Josh Malone	**31**	**405**	**13.1**	**2**
Josh Smith	**23**	**307**	**13.3**	**2**
Ethan Wolf	**23**	**301**	**13.1**	**2**

KICKING: **Aaron Medley, 21-31 FGs, 55-55 XPs, 118 points**

TACKLES: **Jalen Reeves-Maybin, 105**; Brian Randolph, 70

SACKS: **Derek Barnett, 10.0**

INTERCEPTIONS: **Todd Kelly Jr., 3**

Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	35.2 ppg	3	29
Rushing	223.7 ypg	2	20
Passing	198.6 ypg	9	92
Total	422.3 ypg	7	52

DEFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	20.0 ppg	5	16
Rushing	151.6 ypg	9	45
Passing	210.4 ypg	8	47
Total	362.0 ypg	7	36

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
+7	+0.54	4	28

JASHON ROBERTSON

LINEBACKERS The prognosis for the Vols at this spot is the same as it is for them at running back; they're in very good shape. The two players who will get the lion's share of playing time, Jalen Reeves-Maybin and Darrin Kirkland Jr., are both accustomed to such roles and should comprise one of the conference's best linebacking corps. Reeves-Maybin in particular has a lot at stake this season. He was one of Jones' first recruits and has witnessed the program's growth and also turned down this year's NFL Draft to return. He'll also continue to mentor Kirkland, who could easily turn into one of the SEC's best middle linebackers. There are some others in the mix, such as Cortez McDowell, who will be helpful when Tennessee lines up more than two linebackers. But Reeves-Maybin and Kirkland should dictate the success of the unit, and the entire defense.

DEFENSIVE BACKS Had cornerback Cameron Sutton declared for the NFL Draft, it would have been a disastrous offseason for this group, coupled with the departures of Brian Randolph and LaDarrell McNeil. Sutton returns, though, and with him, Tennessee's chances at an improved pass defense. Quarterbacks will purposefully avoid looking Sutton's way, so the other pieces have to be in place. Luckily for the Vols, Justin Martin seemed to minimize the learning curve last season after moving in from the junior college ranks. After waiting in the wings, Todd Kelly Jr. seems to have finally earned a regular job at safety. There's less optimism opposite him, but Evan Berry is a serviceable option.

SPECIALISTS Tennessee had arguably the best group of specialists in the SEC a season ago, and everyone is back. Berry emerged as a threat to take every kickoff he handled back for a touchdown and finished with a 38.3-yard average — a fraction of a yard away from breaking the NCAA's all-time single-season record. On punt returns, Sutton was nearly as dangerous, scoring two touchdowns to Berry's three on kickoffs. At punter, Trevor Daniel was a surprise in his debut season, setting a program record with 45.7 yards per attempt, the eighth-best average in the country. Placekicker wasn't supposed to be a question mark for the 2015 Vols, but Aaron Medley had something of a sophomore slump, missing three critical kicks in a close loss to Alabama and a long-distance try that would have beaten Florida. He said the mistakes were mental, not mechanical, and that his range is 55 yards.

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	33.2	9
DEFENSE	25.0	2
MARGIN	+8.2	3
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	42.6%	57
DEFENSE	36.2%	19
MARGIN	+6.4%	24
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	5.6	70
DEFENSE	5.2	39
MARGIN	+0.4	53
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	4.4	69
DEFENSE	4.1	41
MARGIN	+0.3	52
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	2.3	38
ACTUAL	7	27
MARGIN	+4.7	32

NUMBERS TO KNOW

KEY: **1**-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

5.3 Tennessee's offense improved in 2015, from 4.9 yards per play to 5.6 and from 28.9 points per game to 35.2. The next step for the Volunteers' offense: not waiting until second or third down to succeed. They averaged just 5.3 yards per play on first down, 104th in the country.

4.1 Be it because of predictability, conservatism, or both, Tennessee's offense faltered dramatically in the second half in each of its four losses. The Vols averaged 5.3 yards per play and scored 58 points in the first half of those four games; they averaged 4.1 and scored 27 in the second half and overtime. On multiple occasions, it appeared they were playing it safe and attempting to run out the clock in the second half. It backfired.

53.3 Jalen Hurd was the workhorse, but Alvin Kamara may have deserved a few more touches. Kamara gained at least five yards on 53.3 percent of his carries in 2015; among running backs with 100-plus carries, only two (WKU's Anthony Wales and Baylor's Johnny Jefferson) had a higher rate of opportunity than that. (Hurd's rate: 35.5 percent.)

8.2 Improved offense and solid special teams made Tennessee a dynamic field position team. The Volunteers' field position margin was plus-8.2 yards per possession, third in FBS and first in the SEC. On average, they began their drives at the 33.2 (ninth in FBS) while opponents started at the 25.0. Opponents were always running uphill to catch the Vols.

Tom DiPace

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION	
Defensive Backs	5
Offensive Linemen	3
Wide Receivers	3
Athletes	2
Defensive Linemen	2
Linebackers	2
Tight Ends	2
Running Backs	1
Quarterbacks	1

BY STATE	
Florida	5
Georgia	5
Tennessee	3
Kansas	1
Louisiana	1
Maryland	1
New Jersey	1
North Carolina	1
Ohio	1
South Carolina	1
British Columbia	1

Tennessee's 2016 recruiting class might not have attracted the national attention that the 2014 and 2015 classes did, but that might be a by-product of the numbers game.

As Butch Jones has filled out the Vols' roster, he's been able to transition from filling general needs to more specific ones. That could be why Jones signed 21 players this February, down from 30 a year ago.

After several key receiver departures this offseason, Jones made boosting numbers there a point of emphasis. Lanky junior college transfer Jeff George was on campus in the spring and will likely be a bit ahead of high school signees Brandon Johnson and Corey Henderson by the time the season starts.

Tennessee also stocked itself at defensive back, signing five, including pure talents Tyler Byrd and Marquill Osborne. The late addition of legacy prospect Nigel Warrior, one of the nation's top safeties, nicely wrapped up the class.

The competition to replace senior Joshua Dobbs when he departs became a bit more interesting. While the Vols didn't have a desperate need for a quarterback with Quinten Dormady and Sheriron Jones already waiting, they still managed to land the nation's top dual-threat option in Jarrett Guarantano. His signing assures the program of a fierce battle for the starting job next offseason.

While there will be less of a need for newly signed offensive linemen to come in and help immediately, the addition of three newcomers goes a long way toward ensuring that the Vols are never in the precarious position up front that they were in two seasons ago. In-state tackle Ryan Johnson might be one of the class' more overlooked members.

One spot that Tennessee needed to address further is defensive tackle. The Vols signed just one player at that position.

SPOTLIGHT ON
JONATHAN KONGBO
DE • SURREY, BC

Even for the cutthroat world of major college football recruiting, the battle to win the services of Jonathan Kongbo seems to be one of the toughest Butch Jones has ever fought.

How fierce was it? It wasn't until a week after National Signing Day that the letter of intent from the country's top junior college player made it to Knoxville.

Despite Ole Miss' advances toward Kongbo, Tennessee won over the defensive end with a tried and true technique: ice cream. A week before he made his decision, Kongbo tweeted a photo of him standing with members of the Tennessee coaching staff. The picture of the group holding their cones went viral as Jones wore an ear-to-ear grin, and newly hired defensive coordinator Bob Shoop inexplicably scowled for the camera.

By landing Kongbo, whose life began in the Republic of Congo before he moved to British Columbia and, later, Arizona for junior college, Tennessee has brought in the latest in a growing line of successful pass rushers.

Kongbo will be needed to help fill the void left by Curt Maggitt, who lost his redshirt senior year to an injury but will nevertheless be remembered for his time spent in opposing backfields. If Kongbo is ready immediately, he'll line up opposite Derek Barnett to form a terrifying twosome.

Kongbo had decommitted from Tennessee only weeks before National Signing Day, leaving a noticeable hole in Jones' class. But the coaching staff won him back over with ice cream and the possibility of joining elite company on the defensive line.

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
Daniel Bituli	OLB	6-3/228	Antioch, TN	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	217
Ja'Quain Blakely	OLB	6-2/210	Moultrie, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	558
Devante Brooks	TE	6-5/225	Bowie, MD	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	668
Baylen Buchanan	CB	5-11/187	Lawrenceville, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	685
Tyler Byrd	DB	6-0/195	Naples, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	86
Marquez Callaway	ATH	6-2/170	Warner Robins, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	103
Carlin Fils-Aime	RB	5-11/175	Naples, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	286
Jeff George	WR	6-6/200	Leavenworth, KS	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	31*
Jarrett Guarantano	QB	6-4/205	Lodi, NJ	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	77
Corey Henderson	ATH	6-1/170	Shreveport, LA	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	646
D.J. Henderson	CB	6-0/180	Lyman, SC	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	37*
Alexis Johnson	DT	6-4/295	Atlanta, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	21*
Brandon Johnson	WR	6-2/175	Plantation, FL	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	510
Ryan Johnson	OT	6-6/275	Brentwood, TN	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	283
Jonathan Kongbo	DE	6-6/260	Surrey, BC	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	1*
Nathan Niehaus	OT	6-6/255	Cincinnati, OH	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,062
Marquill Osborne	CB	5-11/183	Cornelius, NC	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	178
Austin Pope	TE	6-4/218	Knoxville, TN	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	658
Marcus Tatum	OT	6-6/265	Ormond Beach, FL	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	448
Nigel Warrior	S	6-0/186	Duluth, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	58
Latrell Williams	WR	5-11/175	Lake City, FL	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	714

*junior college transfer

VANDERBILT COMMODORES

National Forecast: **57** /// *SEC East Prediction:* **5**

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	South Carolina
Sept. 10	Middle Tennessee
Sept. 17	at Georgia Tech
Sept. 24	at Western Kentucky
Oct. 1	Florida
Oct. 8	at Kentucky
Oct. 15	at Georgia
Oct. 22	Tennessee State
Nov. 5	at Auburn
Nov. 12	at Missouri
Nov. 19	Ole Miss
Nov. 26	Tennessee

Progress. That's all Vanderbilt fans were looking for in 2015 after a disappointing — and that is putting kindly — first season under Derek Mason. Mission (mostly) accomplished. Vanderbilt improved from 3–9 overall and 0–8 in the SEC to 4–8 and 2–6. In 2014, the Commodores were outscored by an average of 22.6 points per game in SEC play; last fall, that number dropped to 9.7. In addition, three of the six league defeats came by 11 points or fewer.

"You always want to win more games," Mason says, "but I think we made progress last season. We were in more games. If you watched our games and paid attention, this football team was definitely more competitive. We are on the edge of doing some great things. I am excited."

To take the next step — return to a bowl game for the first time since 2013 — Vanderbilt will need to improve significantly on offense. Despite the aforementioned "progress" as a program, the Commodores still struggled to move the ball with any consistency. They ranked 117th in the nation in total offense (326.5 ypg), 124th in scoring offense (15.2 ppg) and topped 400 yards in only one SEC game (411 vs. Tennessee in a season-finale they lost 53–28).

OREN BURKS

QUARTERBACKS You can point to a lack of playmakers at wide receiver or inadequate play from the line, but the Commodores' biggest offensive issue the past two seasons has been poor quarterback play. In 2015, Vanderbilt had fewer than 200 yards passing in eight straight games — including fewer than 50 three times (44 vs. Houston, 30 vs. Florida, 23 vs. Texas A&M). Kyle Shurmur started five of the last six games as a true freshman and showed enough promise — he started both of the Dores' SEC wins — to earn the title of presumptive 2016 starter. "I believe Vanderbilt has found a quarterback in Kyle Shurmur," Mason said after Shurmur threw for 209 yards and three TDs against Tennessee. The coach softened his stance during the spring, due in part to the re-emergence of Wade Freebeck. A four-game starter as a true freshman in 2014, the strong-armed Freebeck slipped down the QB food chain last fall and played in only one game. He's back in the mix after a strong spring. "Wade has done a great job," Mason said in late March. "He is not going to go away. I want Wade to be an ascending player." Shawn Stankavage, who missed the 2015 season after tearing his ACL last spring, adds a more athletic dimension to the position. He could be used as a change-of-pace option. True freshman Deuce Wallace is expected to redshirt.

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 5-7, 2-6 SEC

Derek Mason's decision to take over the defensive play-calling was one of the driving forces behind Vanderbilt's improvement last year. The Commodores finished sixth in the SEC in scoring defense, and this unit should be solid once again with the return of seven starters. However, Vanderbilt must show similar improvement on offense and special teams this fall to take another step forward. The return of four key players from injury should spark an offense that averaged only 326.5 yards per game and 4.5 yards per play. Quarterback play remains the biggest issue. Kyle Shurmur, or perhaps Wade Freebeck, must add stability to a position that has been in flux since the end of the James Franklin era.

RUNNING BACKS Ralph Webb has been a consistent producer on an offense that has lacked production. He followed a 907-yard freshman season with 1,152 yards as a sophomore — the second-highest single-season total in school history. He did his best work away from home, averaging 103.8 yards in four SEC road games, and added a season-high 155 yards in a win at Middle Tennessee. Webb's not known for his speed, but he outran the Florida secondary on a 74-yard touchdown run in his hometown of Gainesville, Fla. The staff plans on utilizing Webb as a receiver out of the backfield more in 2016. With Darrius Sims and his 5.8 yards-per-carry average now at receiver on a full-time basis, Vanderbilt will be looking to identify some depth during

5-YEAR WIN TREND

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

DEFENSIVE GAINS Whether it was due to Derek Mason taking on a larger role or simply being in the second season in the new 3-4 alignment, Vanderbilt's defense showed drastic improvement in 2015. The Commodores ranked sixth in the SEC in both total defense (350.5 ypg, down from 402.1 in '14) and scoring defense (21.0 ppg, down from 33.3 in '14), and they limited seven of 12 opponents to fewer than 20 points. They also shined in some advanced metrics, ranking first in the nation in Power Success Rate (percent of runs on third or fourth down, 2 yards or less to go, that achieved a first down or TD) and seventh in Stuff Rate (percentage of runs where the runner is tackled at or behind the line of scrimmage). And the Commodores did all this with only one player who received first- or second-team All-SEC honors — sophomore linebacker Zach Cunningham.

A STAR IS BORN Mason has tweaked his defense and introduced the Star, a hybrid defensive back/linebacker that will allow the Commodores to handle spread offenses out of their base defense. "We've added some dimensions to our defense," he says. "It's almost a 3-3-5 out of a 3-4 structure. We get the best of both worlds. It makes us fully equipped to match up against tempo teams, but we're able to keep our base personnel on the field." Junior Oren Burks, who was moved from linebacker to safety when Mason arrived two years ago, will be the starting Star. "He can match up in coverage and still pass rush," Mason says.

ON THE MOVE There were a few intriguing position switches during spring practice. Nehemiah Mitchell, a former junior college transfer, was moved from outside linebacker to defensive end, and linebacker Khari Blasingame was moved across the line of scrimmage, where he will see time as both a tailback and fullback. "Khari has been a pleasant surprise," Mason said during the spring.

STAFF SHAKE-UP Mason fired offensive line coach Kevin Lightner and special teams coordinator/running backs coach Charles Bankins, replacing them with Cameron Norcross and Jeff Genyk, respectively. Norcross had been the offensive line coach at Fresno State since 2012, while Genyk, a former head coach at Eastern Michigan, was a special teams consultant at Northwestern last season. Three other coaches departed for other jobs — linebackers coach Kenwick Thompson (defensive coordinator at East Carolina), defensive line coach Frank Maile (co-defensive coordinator/assistant head coach at Utah State) and cornerbacks coach Bret Maxie (defensive backs, Tampa Bay Buccaneers). Chris Marve, a former All-SEC linebacker at Vanderbilt, was promoted from graduate assistant and will coach the inside linebackers; Osia Lewis was hired from San Diego State and will coach outside linebackers; and C.J. Ah You, a former standout at Oklahoma, will coach the defensive line. Marc Mattioli, who coached only the safeties last season, is now the defensive backs coach. Offensive coordinator Andy Ludwig has switched his focus from QBs to tight ends, and Gerry Gdowski will coach the QBs after serving as tight ends coach the past two seasons.

LB ZACH
CUNNINGHAM

preseason practice. Sophomore Josh Crawford is a true tailback who has decent speed and quick feet. Dallas Rivers and Khari Blasingame, a converted linebacker, are combo backs who will see time at tailback and as fullbacks in two-back sets.

RECEIVERS As recently as 2013, Vanderbilt's starting lineup featured two future NFL wide receivers — Jordan Matthews and Jonathan Krause. But the last two years have seen a huge struggle at the position. However, there is hope for significant improvement in 2016 as the Commodores welcome back three key players who missed most or all of last season with injuries. C.J. Duncan, potentially the team's No. 1 wide receiver, caught 28 passes for 441 yards as a redshirt freshman in 2014 but went down with a torn Achilles last August. DeAndre Woods, who made a successful transition from wide receiver to tight end, caught seven passes for 129 yards in the first three games before tearing his ACL against Austin Peay. And Jared Pinkney, a highly skilled tight end, missed all but one game of his true freshman season with a shoulder injury. Duncan and juniors Trent Sherfield and Caleb Scott will head into fall camp as the top three wideouts. Sherfield led the team with 51 catches and 659 yards, though 240 came against FCS bottom-feeder Austin Peay. Nathan Marcus and Sam Dobbs will join Woods and Pinkney to form a solid group of pass-catching tight ends.

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)				
WR	19	C.J. Duncan (So.)	**9**	**Caleb Scott (Jr.)**
WR	**10**	**Trent Sherfield (Jr.)**	6	Darrius Sims (Sr.)
LT	50	Andrew Jelks (Sr.)	58	Justin Skule (So.)
LG	64	Delando Crooks (Jr.)	76	Egidio DellaRipa (So.)
C	**56**	**Barrett Gouger (Sr.)**	57	Ean Pfeifer (Fr.)
RG	61	Bruno Reagan (So.)	56	Barrett Gouger (Sr.)
RT	**74**	**Will Holden (Sr.)**	75	Bailey Granier (So.)
TE	80	Jared Pinkney (Fr.)	83	Nathan Marcus (Jr.)
QB	14	Kyle Shurmur (So.)	12	Wade Freebeck (Jr.)
RB	**7**	**Ralph Webb (Jr.)**	22	Josh Crawford (So.)
FB	28	Dallas Rivers (Jr.)	23	Khari Blasingame (So.)
DEFENSE (7)				
DE	**69**	**Adam Butler (Sr.)**	94	Torey Agee (Sr.)
DT	77	Nifae Lealao (Jr.)	74	Jay Woods (Jr.)
DE	49	Jonathan Wynn (Jr.)	**44**	**Nehemiah Mitchell (Sr.)**
OLB	99	Landon Stokes (Jr.)	9	Caleb Peart (Fr.)
ILB	52	Nigel Bowden (Jr.)	43	Jordan Griffin (So.)
ILB	**41**	**Zach Cunningham (Jr.)**	25	Josh Smith (So.)
STAR	**20**	**Oren Burks (Jr.)**	33	Jay Hockaday (So.)
CB	**5**	**Torren McGaster (Sr.)**	21	Donovan Sheffield (So.)
CB	**31**	**Tre Herndon (Jr.)**	17	Joejuan Williams (Fr.)
S	7	Emmanuel Smith (Jr.)	**2**	**Arnold Tarpley (Jr.)**
S	14	Ryan White (Jr.)	26	Andrew Rector (So.)
SPECIAL TEAMS				
K	17	Tommy Openshaw (Jr.)	KR	6 Darrius Sims (Sr.)
P		Sam Loy (Fr.)	PR	14 Ryan White (Jr.)

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN As spring practice concluded, Mason had no idea what his starting offensive line would look like when Vanderbilt hosts South Carolina in Week 1. And that's a good thing, according to the coach. "We will have a formidable group — we just need to figure out what our most dynamic lineup will look like," he says. Much will depend on what the staff decides to do with Andrew Jelks, a two-year starter at left tackle who missed last season with a torn ACL. Jelks could return to tackle or take over at center, where the Dores must replace the dependable Spencer Pulley. Jelks' potential move inside would allow Vanderbilt to get both Will Holden and Justin Skule into the starting lineup. Holden filled in for Jelks at left tackle last season after starting on the right side as a sophomore in 2014. Skule broke into the rotation as a true freshman before being sidelined with a leg injury in late October. The coaches believe he has All-SEC potential. If Jelks plays tackle, senior Barrett Gouger, a 10-game starter at guard last year, or redshirt freshman Ean Pfeifer are the top candidates at center. Bruno Reagan and Delando Crooks exited spring practice as the starting guards.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN The Commodores lack star power on the defensive line but return a host of quality players who have logged significant snaps on Mason's three-man front the past two seasons. Jay Woods and Nifae Lealao once again will share the nose tackle position. Lealao, a former top recruit, could be poised for a big junior season. Adam Butler and Torey Agee give Vanderbilt some decent size at end. Butler has been a consistent contributor since cracking the rotation as a freshman. Nehemiah Mitchell moved from outside linebacker to end during the spring. He and Jonathan

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH
Derek Mason

RECORD AT SCHOOL
7-17 (2 years)

CAREER RECORD
7-17 (2 years)

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Andy Ludwig

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Derek Mason

LOCATION
Nashville, TN

STADIUM
Vanderbilt Stadium (40,550)

KEY COMMODORES

RALPH WEBB, RB His 1,152 rushing yards were the second-most in a single season in school history. Ended the year with 100-plus yards in three of the final four games.

ZACH CUNNINGHAM, LB Didn't crack the starting lineup until Week 3 but went on to earn first-team All-SEC honors from both the coaches and media.

ANDREW JELKS, OL Was expected to anchor the offensive line in 2015 from his left tackle spot but went down with a torn ACL during preseason practice. Staff might move him inside to play center as a senior.

TORREN MCGASTER, CB Emerged as the team's top cornerback as a junior. Has good size and plays with some attitude.

DARRIUS SIMS, WR/RS Sims is a dangerous kick returner who has bounced around between running back and wide receiver the past few years.

KEY LOSSES

STEPHEN WEATHERLY, LB Athletic outside linebacker declared for the NFL Draft after his redshirt junior season. Ranked second on the team with 9.5 tackles for a loss in 2015.

DARREON HERRING, LB Hard-working inside backer was the heart and soul of an overachieving defense. He started 36 games over his final three seasons.

STEPHEN SCHEU, TE Production dipped from 39 catches for 525 yards as a junior to 26 for 231 as a senior, but he was still one of the top options in the passing game.

ANDREW WILLIAMSON, S The speedy Williamson didn't post gaudy numbers, but he was a solid contributor.

CALEB AZUBIKE, DE Enjoyed a solid senior season once he settled in at one position (defensive end).

RISING STAR

Tight end **Jared Pinkney** went down with a season-ending shoulder injury on the only pass that came his way as a true freshman. Now healthy, the 6'4", 250-pound redshirt freshman is expected to play a key role. "Pinkney will be a vital piece for the offense," coach Derek Mason says.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 VANDERBILT ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
12	Freebeck, Wade	6-5/224	Jr.	Davie, FL
14	Shurmur, Kyle	6-3/223	So.	Philadelphia, PA
10	Stankavage, Shawn	6-2/198	So.	Durham, NC
2	Wallace, Deuce	6-2/210	Fr.	Sevierville, TN
4	Webb, John	5-11/182	So.	Dallas, TX

RUNNING BACKS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
24	Banks, Jalen	5-11/200	Jr.	Markham, IL
23	Blasingame, Khari	6-1/225	So.	New Market, AL
22	Crawford, Josh	5-10/204	So.	Wetumpka, AL
27	George, Jaire	6-1/204	Fr.	Hyattsville, MD
28	Rivers, Dallas	6-1/226	Jr.	Stone Mtn., GA
7	Webb, Ralph	5-10/200	Jr.	Gainesville, FL

RECEIVERS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
18	Dorrell, Chandler	5-11/190	Sr.	Nashville, TN
19	Duncan, C.J.	5-11/203	So.	Montgomery, AL
36	Ellis, Trey	5-9/163	Jr.	Charlotte, NC
87	Guillory, Winston	5-11/167	So.	Dallas, TX
8	Monroe, Ronald	6-3/200	So.	Houston, TX
86	Rayford, Latevius	6-1/197	Sr.	Memphis, TN
9	Scott, Caleb	6-1/198	Jr.	Suwanee, GA
10	Sherfield, Trent	6-1/199	Jr.	Danville, IL
6	Sims, Darrius	5-9/186	Sr.	Memphis, TN
46	Wilson, Reese	5-10/160	So.	Rockwall, TX

TIGHT ENDS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
88	Anderton, Kyle	6-5/255	So.	Gallatin, TN
84	Dobbs, Sam	6-4/220	So.	Douglasville, GA
89	Dowling, Sean	6-5/265	Jr.	Fallbrook, CA
83	Marcus, Nathan	6-5/242	Jr.	Glen Ellyn, IL
80	Pinkney, Jared	6-4/250	Fr.	Norcross, GA
15	Woods, DeAndre	6-3/235	Jr.	Clay, AL

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
64	Crooks, Delando	6-5/307	Jr.	Atlanta, GA
76	DellaRipa, Egidio	6-4/290	So.	Castaic, CA
56	Gouger, Barrett	6-4/303	Sr.	Soddy Daisy, TN
75	Granier, Bailey	6-6/319	So.	Galliano, LA
60	Hardin, Cole	6-4/307	So.	Florence, AL
74	Holden, Will	6-6/313	Sr.	Green Cove Springs, FL
50	Jelks, Andrew	6-6/303	Sr.	Paris, TN
57	Pfeifer, Ean	6-4/290	Fr.	Bentonville, AR
61	Reagan, Bruno	6-3/316	So.	Clarksville, TN
58	Skule, Justin	6-6/305	So.	Clifton, VA
71	Southers, Jared	6-4/303	Fr.	South Orange, NJ

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
94	Agee, Torey	6-4/285	Sr.	Opelika, AL
69	Butler, Adam	6-4/300	Sr.	Duncanville, TX
70	DeBrossard, Darion	6-5/295	Fr.	Snellville, GA
77	Lealao, Nifae	6-5/317	Jr.	Sacramento, CA
54	Mayle, Kade	6-2/250	So.	McConnelsville, OH
44	Mitchell, Nehemiah	6-4/255	Sr.	Hayward, CA
95	Tindol, Riley	6-5/265	So.	Billingsley, AL
74	Woods, Jay	6-3/285	Jr.	Jackson, GA
49	Wynn, Jonathan	6-4/255	Jr.	Stone Mtn., GA

LINEBACKERS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
52	Bowden, Nigel	6-1/239	Jr.	Macon, GA
20	Burks, Oren	6-3/215	Jr.	Fairfax Station, VA
41	Cunningham, Zach	6-4/230	Jr.	Pinson, AL
43	Griffin, Jordan	6-0/215	So.	Tampa, FL
33	Hockaday, Jay	6-4/220	So.	Nashville, TN
56	Jasper, Bradyn	6-2/236	Jr.	Washington, MO
34	Odeyingbo, Dare	6-2/255	So.	Irving, TX
9	Peart, Caleb	6-1/240	Fr.	Gilbert, AZ
25	Smith, Josh	6-4/238	So.	Murfreesboro, TN
99	Stokes, Landon	6-4/240	Jr.	Orlando, FL
40	Thomas, Ja'karri	6-1/225	Sr.	Tallahassee, FL
47	Wright, Charles	6-3/235	So.	Irvine, CA

DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
3	Ferguson, Taurean	5-9/188	Jr.	Jonesboro, GA
31	Herndon, Tre	6-1/188	Jr.	Chattanooga, TN
12	Jones, Zaire	5-11/190	Fr.	Meridian, MS
30	Lewis, Bryce	6-0/181	So.	Lilburn, GA
5	McGaster, Torren	6-0/200	Sr.	Daphne, AL
26	Rector, Andrew	5-11/198	So.	Nashville, TN
21	Sheffield, Donovan	5-11/187	So.	Nashville, TN
7	Smith, Emmanuel	6-2/222	Jr.	Murfreesboro, TN
2	Tarpley, Arnold	6-0/200	Jr.	Pittsburgh, PA
14	White, Ryan	5-9/190	Jr.	Louisville, KY
15	Wiley, LaDarius	6-1/205	Jr.	Los Angeles, CA
17	Williams, Joejuan	6-3/200	Fr.	Nashville, TN

SPECIALISTS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
37	Johnson, Wilson (LS)	6-1/212	Sr.	Nashville, TN
99	Lekacz, Hayden (K)	6-0/193	Jr.	Glen Ellyn, IL
97	Nelson, Reid (P)	6-2/217	Jr.	Hueytown, AL
17	Openshaw, Tommy (P/K)	6-2/188	Jr.	Jacksonville, FL
60	Schultz, Jacob (LS)	6-4/230	Sr.	Murfreesboro, TN
51	Winkie, Davis (LS)	6-4/250	So.	Cumming, GA

Scouting the COMMODORES

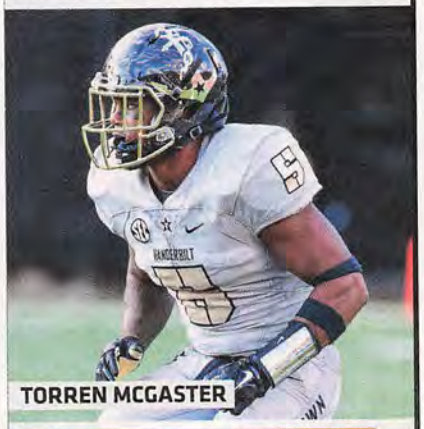
OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP VANDERBILT

"I'm not exaggerating when I say this: Derek Mason is as good of a defensive coach as there is in the world. The fronts they give you are just wacky. They'll play every front that exists. The way they get to their nickel package is unusual because they take out their nose guard instead of sliding their front. They play with really good width on the line of scrimmage, and they do a good job hemming your runs in. They play with four linebackers pretty much all the time, so guys drop into different spots and the pressures come from weird angles. I just flat out don't love playing them, especially if it's early in the year when you don't have them on tape to see what wrinkles they've added. And they just tackle really well. The two things they do fundamentally as good as anybody else — and it must be something they teach — is they tackle really well with two arms around two legs and wrap them up, and they are great at using their hands to get off blocks. ... They're not the most talented team, but in terms of defensive fundamentals, he does it the way you wish everybody would. I have a lot of respect for him and he's got it headed in the right direction, but honestly their personnel isn't going to be as good as the teams they play. You know going in their defense is going to be good enough to keep them in the game. ... Maybe in the second year of the offensive system they'll get a little more production out of their quarterback, but you don't see any gamebreakers on offense."

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: (4-8, 2-6)

Sept.	3	Western Kentucky	L	12-14
Sept.	12	Georgia	L	14-31
Sept.	19	Austin Peay	W	47-7
Sept.	26	at Ole Miss	L	16-27
Oct.	3	at Middle Tennessee	W	17-13
Oct.	17	at South Carolina	L	10-19
Oct.	24	Missouri	W	10-3
Oct.	31	at Houston	L	0-34
Nov.	7	at Florida	L	7-9
Nov.	14	Kentucky	W	21-17
Nov.	21	Texas A&M	L	0-25
Nov.	28	at Tennessee	L	28-53


TORREN MCGASTER

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Johnny McCrary	267	146	1,533	6	12
Kyle Shurmur	**103**	**44**	**503**	**5**	**3**

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Ralph Webb	**277**	**1,152**	**4.2**	**5**
Darrius Sims	**43**	**250**	**5.8**	**1**
Johnny McCrary	70	186	2.7	2
Dallas Rivers	**60**	**183**	**3.0**	**1**

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Trent Sherfield	**51**	**659**	**12.9**	**3**
Steven Scheu	26	231	8.9	1
Caleb Scott	**24**	**339**	**14.1**	**2**
Ralph Webb	**24**	**188**	**7.8**	**2**

KICKING: **Tommy Openshaw, 12-19 FGs, 14-14 XPs, 50 points**

TACKLES: **Zach Cunningham, 103**; Darreon Herring, 64

SACKS: **Zach Cunningham, 4.5**

INTERCEPTIONS: **Oren Burks, 3**

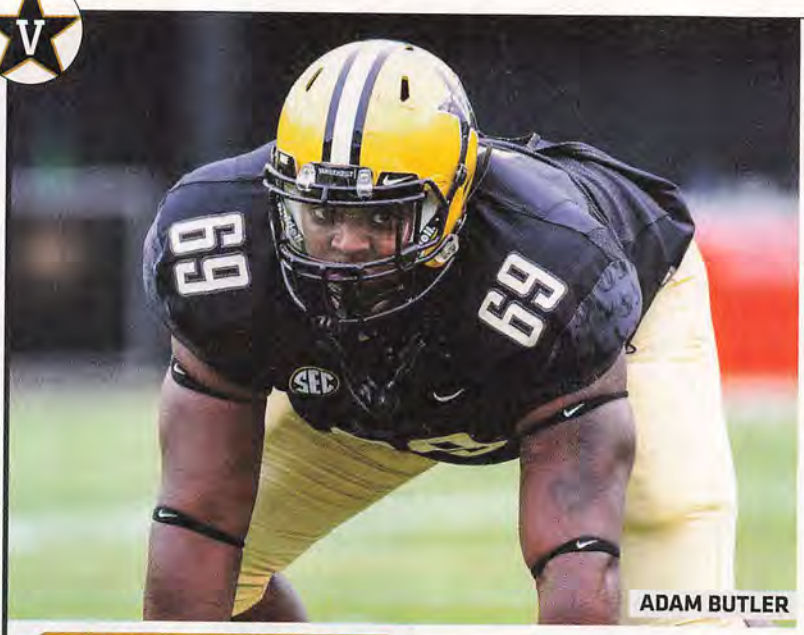
Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	15.2 ppg	13	124
Rushing	154.7 ypg	10	87
Passing	171.8 ypg	13	112
Total	326.5 ypg	13	117

DEFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	21.0 ppg	6	22
Rushing	143.2 ypg	7	33
Passing	207.3 ypg	7	41
Total	350.5 ypg	6	28

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
-8	-0.67	14	109



ADAM BUTLER

Wynn have the athleticism to make plays behind the line of scrimmage.

LINEBACKERS Zach Cunningham was perhaps the most surprising player in the SEC last season, emerging as a first-team all-conference pick despite not starting until Week 3. A gifted athlete, the 6'4", 230-pound Cunningham led the team with 103 tackles and made countless big plays in short-yardage situations. Nigel Bowden, the Dores' top tackler as a redshirt freshman in 2014, missed the final 10 games with a serious concussion. He looked a step faster in the spring after shedding 18 pounds from his 6'1" frame. Josh Smith, the top recruit of the 2015 class, has moved inside after playing his freshman season on the outside. Oren Burks, a two-year starter at safety, will take over as the Star, a new hybrid position that will allow the defense to match up better without switching personnel. Outside backers Landon Stokes and Caleb Peart will be asked to replace some of the production lost when Stephen Weatherly and his 9.5 tackles for a loss departed early for the NFL.

DEFENSIVE BACKS Mason says he likes to have at least five cornerbacks ready to play. Good thing the Commodores have quality depth at the position. Torren McGaster, a physical 6'1", 200-pound senior, headlines the group. Junior Tre Herndon is the favorite to start opposite McGaster once again, but he will be pushed by sophomore Donovan Sheffield and prized freshman Joejuan Williams. Taurean Ferguson has the inside track at nickel back. There will be a fierce battle for playing time at the two safety spots. Emmanuel Smith, Josh's older brother, and Ryan White will head into preseason camp atop the depth chart.

SPECIALISTS Vanderbilt struggled on special teams last season — not something you want to see from a team with a talent deficit. Mason responded by firing special teams coach Charles Bankins, who also coached the running backs, and hiring Jeff Genyk, a former head coach at Eastern Michigan and assistant at Wisconsin and Northwestern (among other schools). Tommy Openshaw is expected to focus on placekicking only after also handling punting duties in 2015. Openshaw converted 6-of-6 from inside 40 yards in 2014 (when he didn't punt) but only 5-of-8 last season. True freshman Sam Loy is the favorite to punt. Sims has made some big plays in the return game, but he averaged only 19.9 yards per kickoff return in 2015.

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	28.8	94
DEFENSE	31.9	109
MARGIN	-3.1	101
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	35.8%	114
DEFENSE	37.1%	22
MARGIN	-1.3%	78
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	4.5	120
DEFENSE	5.2	33
MARGIN	-0.7	100
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	3.0	125
DEFENSE	3.3	6
MARGIN	-0.3	85
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	-0.9	65
ACTUAL	-8	109
MARGIN	-7.1	120

NUMBERS TO KNOW

KEY: 1-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

3.33 Vanderbilt's defense bent a little better without breaking in 2015. The Commodores allowed 4.66 points per scoring opportunity (first downs inside the opponent's 40) in 2014, 94th in FBS, but improved to 3.33 points per chance (sixth) in 2015. It's probably not surprising that their third down defense improved at the same rate — opponents converted 42.2 percent in 2014 (91st) and 28.2 percent in 2015 (sixth).

35.8 Unfortunately for Vanderbilt, the offense couldn't match the defense in terms of improvement. The Commodores still managed a success rate of 35.8 percent, 114th in FBS and 13th in the SEC. Only Missouri was less efficient among SEC teams. And there weren't any big plays to bail them out: They managed just 38 gains of 20-plus yards, more than only two FBS teams (Kent State, UCF).

34.1 The Commodores wanted to play run-heavy football in 2015, but they just couldn't get the necessary push up front. Only 34.1 percent of Vanderbilt's rushes gained at least five yards (111th in FBS), and 22.5 percent of the carries either got stopped at the line or went backwards (105th). It's hard to be a run-first offense when every drive seems to start at second-and-9.

7.1 Based on average fumble recovery rates and the typical ratio of interceptions to passes broken up, Vanderbilt's projected turnover margin was minus-0.9, 65th in FBS. But the ball simply didn't bounce the Commodores' way. Their actual turnover margin was minus-8 (109th), and the 7.1 turnover difference between expected and actual was worst (or least lucky) in the SEC.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION

Defensive Backs	5
Wide Receivers	3
Offensive Linemen	3
Defensive Linemen	3
Linebackers	2
Quarterbacks	1
Running Backs	1
Tight Ends	1
Kickers	1

BY STATE

Georgia	3
California	2
Florida	2
Louisiana	2
Oklahoma	2
Tennessee	2
Virginia	2
Hawaii	1
Indiana	1
Mississippi	1
Pennsylvania	1
Texas	1

Derek Mason highlighted two areas of need at his Signing Day press conference — wide receiver and offensive line. Not surprisingly, the Commodores' head coach believes his staff successfully addressed those areas.

"This class was complete with length, athleticism, explosive players, and we were able to fill an abundance of needs," Mason said.

Vanderbilt signed three three-star wide receivers: Jackson Winrow from Oklahoma, Kalija Lipscomb from Louisiana and Donaven Tennyson from Virginia. Mason singled out Tennyson's abilities in the return game. "I think he's instant offense when you talk about special teams," he said. "I think he can help us immediately."

The offensive line class is headlined by Sean Auwae, a center from Hawaii, and Devin Cochran, a tackle from the Atlanta area. Auwae, originally a UCLA commitment, picked Vanderbilt despite a late push from Louisville. The 6'7", 310-pound Cochran, one of the team's earliest commitments, had reported offers from Florida, Georgia and Tennessee, among many others. "Devin has great feet," Mason says. "He's a very good athlete." The staff believes Braden Kopp, a 6'5", 290-pound tackle from Houston, will emerge as a sleeper in the class. Kopp was an outstanding high school basketball player who didn't focus on football until later in his prep career.

Two of the class' top signees — according to the 247Composite — are early enrollees who will play in the secondary. Joejuan Williams, a top-250 national prospect, is a big cornerback who figures to crack the two-deep in the fall. Zaire Jones, who switched his commitment from Mississippi State to Vanderbilt, is a safety who impressed the staff during the spring. "He's very instinctive," Mason says. "He knows how to get the football."

Quarterback Deuce Wallace, also an early enrollee, committed to Northwestern last spring but flipped to Vanderbilt after the staff assured him he would be the only QB in the class. Wallace, who played two years of high school in New Orleans before moving back to East Tennessee, received late interest from LSU.

SPOTLIGHT ON
JOEJUAN WILLIAMS

DB • Hendersonville, TN

You can make a strong case that Joejuan Williams is the most heavily recruited football player ever to sign with Vanderbilt. There have been higher-ranked players — his 247Sports Composite ranking dipped to 211 nationally after he did not play football as a senior — but very few (if any) Commodore recruits had a more impressive offer list.

The entire SEC as well as Notre Dame, Ohio State and Oklahoma were among his many suitors. He eventually picked Vanderbilt over LSU in mid-December and remained loyal to Mason and staff despite a late push from Alabama.

"Joejuan was a big get for us at Vanderbilt," Mason says. "He stayed home. Sometimes it's hard to keep them in the state. He saw the value, the coaching and the opportunity to compete, and he liked what we brought to the table."

Williams, who starred at Father Ryan High School in Nashville for his first three seasons and transferred to Hendersonville (Tenn.) High School for his senior year, was ruled ineligible to play his final season because his new school was within 20 miles of Father Ryan.

The time off did not have an adverse affect on his play, according to his new head coach.

"He has been very impressive," Mason said during the spring. "He brings length and extreme athleticism."

Some schools targeted Williams as a safety at the collegiate level, but Vanderbilt will give him an opportunity to earn early playing time at corner.

"Any time you can get a long, angular guy who has great hips, great closing speed and good ball skills, you will take that guy and put him outside," Mason says.

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
Sean Auwae	OL	6-4/310	Kapolei, HI	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	525
Drew Birchmeier	DL	6-4/280	Midlothian, VA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	1,463
Devin Cochran	OL	6-7/310	Norcross, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	644
Turner Cockrell	TE	6-5/215	Acworth, GA	★★★	★★	★★	★★★	1,861
Frank Coppet	DB	5-11/180	Fort Lauderdale, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,224
Elijah Hamilton	DB	6-2/190	Roswell, GA	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	1,404
Kenny Hebert	LB	6-4/215	New Orleans, LA	★★	★★	★★	NR	2,201
Zaire Jones	DB	6-0/190	Meridian, MS	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	529
Braden Kopp	OL	6-5/290	Houston, TX	★★★	★★★	★★★	NR	1,440
Kalija Lipscomb	WR	6-1/185	New Orleans, LA	★★★	NR	★★	★★	995
Sam Loy	P/K	6-1/185	San Clemente, CA	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	2,112
Andre Mintze	LB	6-3/225	Philadelphia, PA	★★	★★	★★	NR	2,350
Austin Quillen	DB	5-11/190	Jenks, OK	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	1,400
Josiah Sa'o	DL	6-2/290	San Diego, CA	★★★	★★	★★	★★	1,416
Donaven Tennyson	WR	5-10/170	Richmond, VA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,064
Cameron Tidd	DL	6-3/270	Greenwood, IN	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	1,729
Jamauri Wakefield	RB	6-1/215	Jacksonville, FL	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	1,258
Deuce Wallace	QB	6-2/205	Sevierville, TN	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	568
Joejuan Williams	DB	6-3/195	Nashville, TN	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	212
Jackson Winrow	WR	6-1/180	Sewanee, OK	★★★	NR	★★	★★	916

ALABAMA CRIMSON TIDE

National Forecast: **1** /// *SEC West Prediction:* **1**

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	3	vs. USC #
Sept.	10	Western Kentucky
Sept.	17	at Ole Miss
Sept.	24	Kent State
Oct.	1	Kentucky
Oct.	8	at Arkansas
Oct.	15	at Tennessee
Oct.	22	Texas A&M
Nov.	5	at LSU
Nov.	12	Mississippi State
Nov.	19	Chattanooga
Nov.	26	Auburn

#Arlington, TX

Obituaries were written. The Alabama reign was left for dead last September in the early morning hours after a wild loss to Ole Miss in Bryant-Denny Stadium.

Nick Saban ranted and the momentum slowly built. There was a washout rout at Georgia, an interception party at College Station and the Heisman handoff with LSU. The Crimson Tide eased by Auburn and then Florida in the SEC Championship Game. A 38–0 Cotton Bowl humbling of Michigan State set up the final statement in Arizona. The 45–40 desert classic with Clemson left Alabama back where it had finished three previous times in the Saban era.

Now what? The adversity and motivation that drove last year's run back to the top disappeared into the sea of confetti and streamers. The swagger never really left, but it has the affirmation of proving that the dynasty obituaries were premature. Now all they have to do is the same thing again this fall. Expectations aren't leaving with the first-round draft picks Alabama will replace this fall. The target will be big as ever as Saban begins Year 10 in Tuscaloosa.

CAM ROBINSON

QUARTERBACKS The third straight year of a quarterback competition kicked off in the spring. Consecutive seasons with senior starters again leave Lane Kiffin without an incumbent. Experience isn't as plentiful as potential with four players in the mix to replace Jake Coker. The variety of skills speak to the shifting philosophies in the Crimson Tide offense. Cooper Bateman, Blake Barnett and Jalen Hurts each bring a mobile dimension that differs from nearly every other quarterback in the Saban era. David Cornwell, coming off a strong spring, offers a more traditional pro-style game. Bateman remains the only quarterback who's played in a college game. He actually started the Ole Miss loss in September, completing 11-of-14 passes for 87 yards before an interception brought Coker off the bench. Bateman might not be the fastest of the mobile threats, but he can take off. His experience in the program gives him another edge. Cornwell brings prototypical size (6'5", 234) and was also a contender early in the 2015 battle before dropping back in the pack. Barnett is the most intriguing possibility given the recruiting profile the Californian brought across the country. The No. 2-ranked passer in the 2015 signing class made him the best Alabama recruit at his position since Phillip Sims in 2010. Consistency is his top priority in Year 2 with the Tide. Hurts enrolled early in January to get a head start on college but is the outside contender in this one.

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 12-1, 7-1 SEC

History isn't on Alabama's side as it pursues a second straight national title. Only one team (Alabama in 2011-12) has managed to repeat since 1996. While the path to another championship won't be easy, there's not a team — or a coach in Nick Saban — better equipped to handle this challenge. Five starters return from a defense that was one of the best in the nation last season, and there's a new wave of stars ready to emerge. While there's uncertainty at quarterback for the third year in a row, the supporting cast should ease the transition under center. The road schedule in SEC play could be Alabama's biggest obstacle to another national championship.

Postseason: National Championship Game vs. Florida State

RUNNING BACKS For the first time in Saban's tenure, the Tide will be without the top two rushers from the previous year, though this new predicament is offset to some degree by talent. Derrick Henry's record-crushing Heisman season sent him on to NFL, and Kenyan Drake graduated. Bo Scarbrough is the primary reason nobody's panicking in the Alabama football complex. One teammate even said the former top recruit could be even better than Henry even though his college highlight reel includes just 18 carries in mop-up time last season. His 6'2", 230-pound size evokes memories of Henry (6'3", 242). A powerful running style could put him in that expanding line of Alabama running back greats. The top returner is Damien Harris, who also

5-YEAR WIN TREND

Robinson: Chris Covatta; Ridley: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

NEW ASSISTANTS Staff turnover is commonplace at Alabama. The latest changes were significant for a few reasons. First, a new coach will lead the Alabama defense for the first time since 2007, as Jeremy Pruitt replaces Kirby Smart, who left to be the new head coach at Georgia. But with two of the three new assistants, there's prior experience in the program. Pruitt was part of Saban's staff from 2007-12, and new secondary coach Derrick Ansley was a graduate assistant from 2010-11. Offensive line coach Brent Key was the only totally new addition. He was the offensive line coach and running backs coach at UCF last season and had served on the Knights' staff since 2005.

TURNING DOWN THE NFL As usual, Alabama's roster will be bolstered by a class loaded with elite recruits. But some of the Tide's key "recruits" in the offseason were tight end O.J. Howard, defensive end Jonathan Allen, linebacker Tim Williams and safety Eddie Jackson — each of whom turned down an opportunity to leave early for the NFL Draft. Nick Saban only had to point to players such as Reggie Ragland and Jarran Reed, both of whom turned down the NFL a year earlier after receiving second-round grades and played their way into first-round marks.

EARLY SCOUTING Alabama linebacker Shaun Dion Hamilton won't need an introduction to his new teammate Lyndell "Mack" Wilson. They weren't just teammates at Carver High School in Montgomery — Hamilton and Wilson have been friends for years. It started when Hamilton heard rumors of this freak athlete making noise in middle school. "Everybody was talking about this Mack kid, like he was the hottest thing in middle school. He was already 6'1" in middle school, so I was like, I've got to meet this kid.' He was like the next big thing. They were talking about him starting as a freshman in high school." Four years later, Wilson was one of the top linebacker recruits in the country.

IMMEDIATE CONTRIBUTIONS True freshman quarterback Jalen Hurts, an early enrollee, was quickly put to work by the Alabama coaching staff in January. Wearing No. 4, Hurts mimicked Clemson star Deshaun Watson during pre-championship game practices. "It felt good to know that I helped in preparation for winning the national title — that I had a little something to do with that," he says. "It was a great experience."

LEADERSHIP HUNT The biggest difference between Alabama's 2015 title team and the previous two teams that fell short of that goal was the mentality. It started with no-nonsense leadership from players such as A'Shawn Robinson, Reed and Ragland. "There's different kind of leaders," linebacker Ryan Anderson says. "A'Shawn was that kind of leader. We don't have anybody that's 6'4", 320 pounds that can dunk a basketball. We don't have guys big like that anymore." Reuben Foster, Anderson, Allen and Jackson are candidates for the next wave of leaders for the Alabama defense.

WR CALVIN RIDLEY

saw limited time at the end of games last season. Like Scarbrough, he brought a five-star recruiting profile to Alabama. Harris should get more opportunity as a sophomore. Depth will come from highly regarded recruit B.J. Emmons. Experience might be lacking at this position. Talent isn't.

RECEIVERS This could be the strength of Alabama's offense in 2016. Returning and incoming talent should create intense competition in August practice with playmakers all over the field. Calvin Ridley showed his game-changing ability in a breakout rookie season. Big catches against Arkansas, Florida and Michigan State came in crucial moments. His speed and quick-cut ability separate him. Robert Foster, the No. 2 receiver in the 2013 recruiting class, is back from a season-ending shoulder injury. Before going down against Ole Miss, Foster was viewed as the big-play receiver. ArDarius Stewart's back after making some of the biggest catches of the season. Quick with steady hands, he brings the most experience to this group. The wild card comes from another graduate transfer. Following in the steps of Richard Mullaney, former Bowling Green receiver Gehrig Dieter is Alabama-bound after a 1,033-yard season in the MAC. That included a seven-catch, 133-yard afternoon against Tennessee. Add in the big-play ability that tight end O.J. Howard showed in the championship game, and this group is stacked.

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	3	**Calvin Ridley (So.)**	17	Cam Sims (Jr.)
WR	1	Robert Foster (Jr.)		Gehrig Dieter (Sr.)
WR	13	**ArDarius Stewart (Jr.)**	81	Derek Kief (So.)
LT	74	**Cam Robinson (Jr.)**	78	Korren Kirven (Sr.)
LG	66	Lester Cotton (So.)	59	Dallas Warmack (So.)
C	71	**Ross Pierschbacher (So.)**	63	J.C. Hassenauer (Jr.)
RG	56	Brandon Kennedy (Fr.)	50	**Alphonse Taylor (Sr.)**
RT	73	Jonah Williams (Fr.)	78	Korren Kirven (Sr.)
TE	88	**O.J. Howard (Sr.)**	84	Hale Hentges (So.)
QB	18	Cooper Bateman (Jr.)	12	David Cornwell (So.)
RB	9	Bo Scarbrough (So.)	34	Damien Harris (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	93	**Jonathan Allen (Sr.)**		Quinnen Williams (Fr.)
DT	94	Da'Ron Payne (So.)	69	Joshua Frazier (Jr.)
DE	9	Da'Shawn Hand (Jr.)	54	Dalvin Tomlinson (Sr.)
OLB	56	Tim Williams (Sr.)	47	Christian Miller (So.)
ILB	10	**Reuben Foster (Sr.)**	32	Rashaan Evans (Jr.)
ILB	20	Shaun Dion Hamilton (Jr.)	42	Keith Holcombe (So.)
OLB	22	Ryan Anderson (Sr.)	32	Rashaan Evans (Jr.)
CB	26	**Marlon Humphrey (So.)**	21	Maurice Smith (Sr.)
CB	29	**Minkah Fitzpatrick (So.)**	11	Kendall Sheffield (Fr.)
SS	4	**Eddie Jackson (Sr.)**	27	Shawn Burgess-Becker (So.)
FS	15	Ronnie Harrison (So.)	6	Hootie Jones (Jr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	99	Adam Griffith (Sr.)	KR	31 Xavian Marks (So.)
P	15	JK Scott (Jr.)	PR	3 Calvin Ridley (So.)

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN This competition won't receive the attention of the quarterback battle, but there are some holes to fill — none bigger than at center, where the graduation of three-year starter Ryan Kelly might be the biggest loss from 2015. Ross Pierschbacher, the starter at left guard last season, appears to be the solution even if he's practically new to the position. The trickle-down effect along with the graduation of right tackle Dominick Jackson means new starters in at least three of the five spots. The idea is to find the five best players and find roles for each. The safest job belongs to Cam Robinson at left tackle despite his spring injury. Sophomore Lester Cotton emerged as a possible starter at either guard or tackle after backing up Robinson last season. Korren Kirven also made a case for the right tackle job, while five-star freshman Jonah Williams made a strong first impression in spring practice.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN Alabama's defensive line in 2015 could be remembered as the most complete in college history. The group went nine or 10 players deep. That cushion is gone along with starters A'Shawn Robinson and Jarran Reed as well as key reserve D.J. Pettway. What's left is a collection of former top recruits, some of whom had to wait their turn behind the last crop. The most intriguing player is Da'Shawn Hand. The one-time top-five overall recruit spent two years as a reserve but will have a primary role this season. Dalvin Tomlinson has also waited his turn after playing an increasingly important role in recent years. His ability to push the interior line backward resulted in six pass breakups and four QB hurries. Jonathan Allen's decision to return to school and bypass the NFL Draft was huge. He offers leadership and talent.

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH
Nick Saban

RECORD AT SCHOOL
105-18 (9 years)

CAREER RECORD
196-60-1 (20 years)

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Lane Kiffin

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Jeremy Pruitt

LOCATION
Tuscaloosa, AL

STADIUM
Bryant-Denny Stadium (101,821)

KEY CRIMSON TIDE

EDDIE JACKSON, DB Strong safety had six of the Crimson Tide's 19 interceptions last season, helping the Tide lead the SEC in turnover margin.

REUBEN FOSTER, LB The leading returning tackler and potentially the next great Tide linebacker, Foster plays a hard-hitting brand of football that will be appreciated by the Alabama fans.

CAM ROBINSON, LT Almost certainly a first-round draft pick in 2017, Robinson brings continuity in a group with a new center and position coach.

CALVIN RIDLEY, WR The top big-play threat in Alabama's offense will make life easier for the new starting quarterback.

JONATHAN ALLEN, DE Another potential future first-rounder, Allen knows this defense as well as anyone and hits as hard as any defensive end.

KEY LOSSES

A'SHAWN ROBINSON, DL The heart and soul of the top college football defensive line in recent memory had immeasurable leadership qualities along with a mean streak.

RYAN KELLY, C Kelly was the quarterback of the line who made all the calls with three different starting passers behind him.

DERRICK HENRY, RB The Heisman Trophy winner was the focal point of everything Alabama's offense did regardless of whether he touched the ball or not.

CYRUS JONES, CB Routinely named the toughest corner in the SEC by top receivers like Laquon Treadwell and De'Runnya Wilson.

REGGIE RAGLAND, LB The play-caller in the middle of the defense, Ragland was a versatile player with a big-hitting reputation and a big personality in the locker room.

RISING STAR

Lester Cotton appears to be the next star Alabama offensive lineman in the making. A backup left tackle as a true freshman, the Tuscaloosa product has shown the versatility to play both guard and tackle. That adaptability will make him a candidate for any opening in a young unit.

Chris Covatta

2016 ALABAMA ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
8 Barnett, Blake	6-5/198	Fr.	Corona, CA
18 Bateman, Cooper	6-3/224	Jr.	Murray, UT
12 Cornwell, David	6-5/234	So.	Norman, OK
2 Hurts, Jalen	6-2/210	Fr.	Channelview, TX

RUNNING BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
5 Clark, Ronnie	6-2/217	So.	Calera, AL
43 Erekosima, Lawrence	5-7/180	Jr.	Simpsonville, SC
33 Gore, Derrick	5-11/212	Jr.	Syracuse, NY
34 Harris, Damien	5-11/214	So.	Berea, KY
31 Marks, Xavian	5-8/163	So.	Rosenberg, TX
44 Reid, Avery	6-0/192	So.	Oneonta, AL
9 Scarbrough, Bo	6-2/230	So.	Northport, AL
40 Turner, Ty	5-9/171	So.	Birmingham, AL

RECEIVERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
41 Bearden, Parker	6-1/201	So.	Bessemer, AL
4 Charlot, Daylon	6-0/195	So.	Patterson, LA
Dieter, Gehrig	6-3/209	Sr.	South Bend, IN
39 Dunn, Tre'	6-0/170	Jr.	Raleigh, NC
80 Falkins, Raheem	6-4/202	Jr.	New Orleans, LA
1 Foster, Robert	6-2/191	Jr.	Monaca, PA
38 Johnson, Austin	6-2/200	So.	Elba, AL
81 Kief, Derek	6-4/200	So.	Cincinnati, OH
47 Pugh, Josh	6-1/208	So.	Chelsea, AL
89 Purifoye, Armani	6-0/190	Jr.	Kingsland, GA
37 Rice, Jonathan	6-4/207	So.	Madison, AL
3 Ridley, Calvin	6-1/188	So.	Coconut Creek, FL
16 Simmons, T.J.	6-2/196	Fr.	Pinson, AL
17 Sims, Cam	6-5/206	Jr.	Monroe, LA
13 Stewart, ArDarius	6-1/204	Jr.	Fultondale, AL
82 Willis, JaMichael	6-0/199	Sr.	Gardendale, AL
35 Woods, Thomas	5-6/165	Jr.	Birmingham, AL

TIGHT ENDS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
94 Ball, Dakota	6-3/268	Sr.	Lindale, GA
45 Bryant, Hunter	6-5/226	Jr.	Roswell, GA
87 Forristall, Miller	6-5/220	Fr.	Cartersville, GA
89 Greene, Brandon	6-5/307	Sr.	Ellenwood, GA
86 Harris, Truett	6-3/235	Sr.	Brentwood, TN
84 Hentges, Hale	6-5/256	So.	Jefferson City, MO
88 Howard, O.J.	6-6/242	Sr.	Prattville, AL
49 Moore, Brandon	6-0/248	Sr.	Cincinnati, OH
42 Parker, Jacob	6-1/224	Jr.	Meridianville, AL

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
70 Baldwin, Charles	6-5/297	Jr.	Windsor, CT
75 Bozeman, Bradley	6-5/312	Jr.	Roanoke, AL
67 Casher, Josh	6-1/284	So.	Mobile, AL
66 Cotton, Lester	6-4/319	So.	Tuscaloosa, AL
62 Davis, Will	6-5/325	Sr.	Letohatchee, AL
63 Hassenauer, J.C.	6-2/297	Jr.	Woodbury, MN
56 Kennedy, Brandon	6-3/302	Fr.	Wetumpka, AL
78 Kirven, Korren	6-4/308	Sr.	Lynchburg, VA
79 Owens, Chris	6-3/307	Fr.	Arlington, TX
72 Petitbon, Richie	6-4/300	Fr.	Annapolis, MD
71 Pierschbacher, Ross	6-4/304	So.	Cedar Falls, IA
74 Robinson, Cam	6-6/327	Jr.	Monroe, LA
50 Taylor, Alphonse	6-5/345	Sr.	Mobile, AL
64 Thomas, Eastwood	6-5/297	So.	Jackson, AL
59 Warmack, Dallas	6-2/299	So.	Atlanta, GA
73 Williams, Jonah	6-5/288	Fr.	Folsom, CA
77 Womack, Matt	6-7/320	Fr.	Hernando, MS

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
93 Allen, Jonathan	6-3/294	Sr.	Leesburg, VA
36 Dwight, Johnny	6-3/306	So.	Rochelle, GA
69 Frazier, Joshua	6-4/315	Jr.	Springdale, AR
9 Hand, Da'Shawn	6-4/278	Jr.	Woodbridge, VA
51 Long, Jake	5-9/228	Sr.	Vestavia Hills, AL
94 Payne, Da'Ron	6-2/319	So.	Birmingham, AL
91 Smith, O.J.	6-2/315	So.	Bossier City, LA
54 Tomlinson, Dalvin	6-3/307	Sr.	McDonough, GA

LINEBACKERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
31 Anderson, Keaton	6-1/215	Fr.	Florence, AL
22 Anderson, Ryan	6-2/253	Sr.	Daphne, AL
49 Bell, Christian	6-4/246	Fr.	Hoover, AL
48 Brown, Mekhi	6-5/243	Fr.	Columbus, GA
43 Busch, Gussie	5-11/205	So.	St. Louis, MO
32 Evans, Rashaan	6-3/230	Jr.	Auburn, AL
10 Foster, Reuben	6-1/240	Sr.	Auburn, AL
46 Garnett, Derrick	6-1/240	Jr.	Tuscaloosa, AL
20 Hamilton, Shaun Dion	6-0/232	Jr.	Montgomery, AL
42 Holcombe, Keith	6-4/227	So.	Tuscaloosa, AL
33 Jennings, Anfernee	6-3/268	Fr.	Dadeville, AL
19 Jennings, Shawn	6-1/228	Fr.	Dadeville, AL
40 McMillon, Joshua	6-3/245	Fr.	Memphis, TN
47 Miller, Christian	6-4/230	So.	Columbia, SC
16 Mosley, Jamey	6-5/226	So.	Mobile, AL
17 Thomas, Adonis	6-2/225	Fr.	Lawrenceville, GA
56 Williams, Tim	6-4/237	Sr.	Baton Rouge, LA

DEFENSIVE BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
41 Anderson, Blaine	5-10/187	Sr.	Charlotte, NC
28 Averett, Anthony	6-0/180	Jr.	Woodbury, NJ
7 Brown, Tony	6-0/194	Jr.	Beaumont, TX
27 Burgess-Becker, Shawn	6-1/215	So.	Coconut Creek, FL
29 Fitzpatrick, Minkah	6-1/200	So.	Old Bridge, NJ
47 Grant, Bo	6-2/195	Sr.	Valley, AL
15 Harrison, Ronnie	6-3/216	So.	Tallahassee, FL
26 Humphrey, Marlon	6-1/198	So.	Hoover, AL
4 Jackson, Eddie	6-0/194	Sr.	Lauderdale Lakes, FL
6 Jones, Hootie	6-2/214	Jr.	Monroe, LA
36 Marks, Torin	5-11/175	Fr.	Rosenberg, TX
37 Mosley, Donavan	5-10/185	So.	San Antonio, TX
11 Sheffield, Kendall	6-0/188	Fr.	Missouri City, TX
21 Smith, Maurice	6-0/195	Sr.	Sugar Land, TX
34 Staskelunas, Nate	6-3/207	Sr.	Greenville, NC
14 Thompson, Deionte	6-2/190	Fr.	Orange, TX
44 Wallace, Levi	6-0/170	Jr.	Tucson, AZ

SPECIALISTS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
99 Griffith, Adam (K)	5-10/193	Sr.	Calhoun, GA
55 Mazza, Cole (LS)	6-2/235	Sr.	Bakersfield, CA
53 Parris, Ryan (LS)	6-0/209	So.	Madison, AL
96 Raborn, Gunnar (K)	5-9/180	Jr.	Lafayette, LA
98 Satterfield, Brannon (P)	6-2/210	So.	Austin, TX
15 Scott, JK (P)	6-5/198	Jr.	Denver, CO

Scouting the CRIMSON TIDE

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP ALABAMA

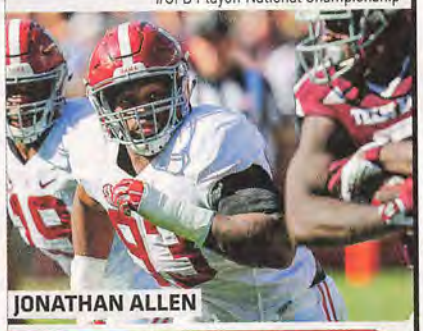
"I think everybody on the outside looking in will say the biggest thing to replace is the defensive linemen they lost, but people will be surprised. Dalvin Tomlinson is going to be really good, and Jonathan Allen coming back is huge. They won't lose as much as people think. They have plenty of pass rushers. Obviously the depth may not be quite what it was last year, but the tank isn't empty by any means. They're still dang good, and Da'Ron Payne at nose tackle has a chance to be as good as any of them. He was the strongest kid on their team as a freshman. ... I don't think there will be much fall-off at linebacker, even losing Reggie Ragland, because they'll have Reuben Foster playing a bigger role, and I've heard their coaches say Shaun Dion Hamilton is probably the smartest linebacker on their team. ... The hardest guy to replace for them will be Cyrus Jones, but they have some good young talent at corner. ... I think it's going to be a complete tossup at quarterback again. Honestly, they were doing everything they could not to start Jake Coker last year. You watch him throw, you think you're watching Tom Brady, but he had some really big deficiencies and struggled making decisions. They really simplified things offensively. The future is probably Blake Barnett, but Cooper Bateman was ahead of him at the end of the season and does some things athletically that they can work with. They're looking for somebody to step up."

2015 RESULTS

RECORD: 14-1, 7-1 (SEC)

Sept.	5	vs. Wisconsin %	W	35-17
Sept.	12	Middle Tennessee	W	37-10
Sept.	19	Ole Miss	L	37-43
Sept.	26	UL Monroe	W	34-0
Oct.	3	at Georgia	W	38-10
Oct.	10	Arkansas	W	27-14
Oct.	17	at Texas A&M	W	41-23
Oct.	24	Tennessee	W	19-14
Nov.	7	LSU	W	30-16
Nov.	14	at Mississippi State	W	31-6
Nov.	21	Charleston Southern	W	56-6
Nov.	28	at Auburn	W	29-13
Dec.	5	vs. Florida &	W	29-15
Dec.	31	vs. Michigan State $	W	38-0
Jan.	11	vs. Clemson #	W	45-40

%Arlington &Atlanta $Cotton Bowl: CFB Playoff Semifinal
#CFB Playoff National Championship



JONATHAN ALLEN

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Jake Coker	393	263	3,110	21	8
Cooper Bateman	**52**	**37**	**291**	**1**	**2**

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Derrick Henry	395	2,219	5.6	28
Kenyan Drake	77	408	5.3	1
Damien Harris	**46**	**157**	**3.4**	**1**
Bo Scarbrough	**18**	**104**	**5.8**	**1**

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Calvin Ridley	**89**	**1,045**	**11.7**	**7**
ArDarius Stewart	**63**	**700**	**11.1**	**4**
O.J. Howard	**38**	**602**	**15.8**	**2**
Richard Mullaney	38	390	10.3	5

KICKING: Adam Griffith, 23-32 FGs, 62-62 XPs, 131 points

TACKLES: Reggie Ragland, 102; **Reuben Foster, 73**

SACKS: **Jonathan Allen, 12.0**

INTERCEPTIONS: **Eddie Jackson, 6**

Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	35.1 ppg	4	30
Rushing	199.9 ypg	3	32
Passing	227.1 ypg	5	62
Total	427.1 ypg	5	45

DEFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	15.1 ppg	1	3
Rushing	75.7 ypg	1	1
Passing	200.6 ypg	6	30
Total	276.3 ypg	1	3

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
+10	+0.67	1	21

MINKAH FITZPATRICK

LINEBACKERS It's Reuben Foster's turn at the alpha middle linebacker role, and he'll have a few experienced pass rushers flanking him on the outside. Tim Williams (10.5 sacks) and Ryan Anderson (6.0) are back after breakout seasons on the edge. Replacing Reggie Ragland's experience and leadership will be the biggest factor, but Foster has waited his turn for this moment. He was directing the young players throughout spring practice as he transitions into the role a five-star recruiting profile dictates. This should also be a big year for Shaun Dion Hamilton when the Tide plays a base 3-4 defense. Rashaan Evans saw time at both middle and outside linebacker in the spring, and Christian Miller made a strong impression as another edge pass rusher.

DEFENSIVE BACKS This is another group that lost a few talented players but is stocked with potential. Starters Marlon Humphrey (cornerback), Eddie Jackson (safety) and Minkah Fitzpatrick (Star) are back after a season of redemption for a once-beleaguered secondary. The 19 interceptions from the group helped wipe away memories of breakdowns that ended the 2014 season. The group returning accounted for 13 of those picks. New defensive backs coach Derrick Ansley will have to pick up where Mel Tucker took this group in his one season before leaving for the defensive coordinator's job at Georgia. The question will be who'll fill the role of Cyrus Jones, the cornerback Saban called Alabama's best in coverage the past two seasons. He brought an edge to the backfield that will be missed this fall. Look for young players such as Kendall Sheffield to make a play for the job along with Anthony Averett. At safety, the graduation of Geno Matias-Smith should mean an increased role for Ronnie Harrison after a solid freshman season. Maurice Smith also made a play for increased action this spring.

SPECIALISTS The questions are not about who'll do the kicking; it's who'll field the ball when opponents kick in Alabama's direction. Adam Griffith is back for his final year as the placekicker after a solid 2015 season. JK Scott was one of the best punters in the country as a freshman in 2014 and recovered well from a slow start last fall. There should be healthy competition for the punt and kick returner jobs this August. None of the returning players had any experience last season returning punts, so it should be a wide-open competition. Harris had nine kickoff returns (19.3-yard average) and is a candidate to replace Drake in that role.

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	33.2	10
DEFENSE	27.6	22
MARGIN	+5.6	11
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	43.8%	42
DEFENSE	29.7%	2
MARGIN	+14.1%	3
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	5.9	49
DEFENSE	4.3	2
MARGIN	+1.6	10
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	4.3	78
DEFENSE	3.6	13
MARGIN	+0.7	30
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	15.4	1
ACTUAL	10	13
MARGIN	-5.4	115

NUMBERS TO KNOW

KEY: **1**-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

22.9 If you're looking for the biggest change between Alabama's very good 2014 defense and incredible 2015 defense, look no further than havoc. Havoc rate is a team's tackles for a loss, forced fumbles and passes defensed (intercepted or broken up) divided by total defensive plays. In 2014, the Crimson Tide ranked a solid 19th in havoc at 18.7 percent. In 2015, they ranked first at 22.9 percent.

43.8 The Tide managed an offensive success rate of 43.8 percent in 2015, 42nd in the country and sixth in the SEC. But that was down 6.4 points from 2014. Derrick Henry was great, but the passing game was often an issue. The Tide's passer rating was just 143.5 in 2015, down from 155.7 the previous season, and it was quite a bit worse until Jake Coker's late-season hot streak (last four games: 159.9 passer rating).

71.2 He was yanked from his only start (the loss to Ole Miss), but Cooper Bateman did show a promising level of accuracy in limited action in 2015. He completed 37-of-52 passes, or 71.2 percent. Of course, he also averaged only 7.9 yards per completion.

5.4 Based on average fumble recovery rates and the typical ratio of interceptions to passes broken up, Alabama's projected turnover margin was plus-15.4, first in FBS. But their actual turnover margin was plus-10 (13th), and the 5.4 turnover difference between expected and actual was second-worst (or least lucky) in the SEC. Gosh, if only Alabama had caught some breaks.

Chris Covatta

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION

Defensive Backs	6
Defensive Linemen	5
Offensive Linemen	5
Linebackers	3
Running Backs	2
Tight Ends	2
Quarterbacks	1
Wide Receivers	1

BY STATE

Alabama	7
Texas	4
Mississippi	3
California	2
Louisiana	2
District of Columbia	1
Florida	1
Georgia	1
Maryland	1
New York	1
North Carolina	1
Oklahoma	1

Yet again, Alabama topped all the major recruiting rankings when National Signing Day rolled around in February. There was a little more drama with the 2016 haul, with Signing Day decisions bringing top players Lyndell "Mack" Wilson, Ben Davis and Shyheim Carter to Alabama. The last few classes were wrapped up well in advance of early February. The class includes eight early enrollees and has players from 11 states and Washington, D.C.

All of the team's major needs were filled. Quarterback Jalen Hurts brings another dual-threat passer into the competition. Five-star tackle Jonah Williams is in position to compete for immediate playing time or spend a season training to replace Cam Robinson at left tackle. One of the late pick-ups, Mississippi offensive tackle Scott Lashley, looks the part of a future stalwart on the line.

The departure of top running backs Derrick Henry and Kenyan Drake will create increased opportunity for B.J. Emmons and Joshua Jacobs. One of the freshmen figures to play right away.

On defense, five-star players such as Davis and Wilson bring some in-state flavor to a linebacker position that continues to be a Crimson Tide hallmark. The defensive line, another Tide strength, was restocked with big bodies such as four-star Kendell Jones (6'5", 350) and Raekwon Davis (6'7", 325).

Also keep an eye on athletic defensive back Nigel Knott, defensive end/linebacker Terrell Hall and junior college offensive tackle Charles Baldwin.

"Until it's all said and done, until these guys all grow and develop, you really don't know what kind of class you have," Nick Saban said — as usual — on Signing Day. "It's everybody's guestimate at this point as to what kind of class we really have. We're excited about them. We're pleased with them. But you know, you can't make predictions about these type of things."

SPOTLIGHT ON

BEN DAVIS

LB • GORDO, AL

Growing up just a few miles from Alabama's campus, Ben Davis was seemingly destined to play football for the Crimson Tide. He's the son of two Alabama graduates, and Davis' father, Wayne Davis, still holds the school tackle record (327) after starring for the Tide from 1983-86

Still, the Gordo High School product said he waited until the last day to pick Alabama after visiting Auburn the previous weekend. Either way, Davis has the potential to be the next great Tide middle linebacker. He has all the credentials as a consensus five-star prospect and *USA Today* first-team All-American. There's no hiding from those expectations. So Davis embraces them.

"I want to be a Freshman All-American, be a team leader always and run around and make plays," Davis says. "I'm going to be coachable. I know I don't know everything yet so I will just continue grinding, stay humble and just work hard."

As a senior, Davis made 105 tackles, three sacks and two interceptions while catching 33 passes on offense for 510 yards and seven scores. Davis and fellow five-star linebacker Lyndell "Mack" Wilson have the potential to do something special at Alabama.

"We thought they were outstanding players," Nick Saban says, "very athletic guys, both of them can run. They're instinctive players, and the goal for us is to teach those guys as much as we can as soon as we can because this is a position where we've had lots of guys in the past contribute as freshmen. ... And we didn't have a lot of depth at that position this year, so I think how quickly these guys can learn and grow and develop at that position is important because I think they both have the kind of athletic ability and critical factors at that position that we're looking for."

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
Charles Baldwin	OT	6-5/310	Brooklyn, NY	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	2*
Christian Bell	LB	6-4/220	Hoover, AL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	446
Deonte Brown	OG	6-4/350	Decatur, AL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	175
Shyheim Carter	CB	6-0/190	Kentwood, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	71
Ben Davis	ILB	6-4/240	Gordo, AL	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	10
Raekwon Davis	DT	6-7/325	Meridian, MS	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	83
Trevon Diggs	WR	6-2/185	Gaithersburg, MD	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	113
B.J. Emmons	RB	6-0/220	Morganton, NC	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	35
Miller Forristall	TE	6-5/220	Cartersville, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	376
Terrell Hall	LB	6-5/245	Washington, DC	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	64
Jalen Hurts	QB	6-2/205	Channelview, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	176
Joshua Jacobs	RB	5-10/200	Tulsa, OK	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	461
Shawn Jennings	DB	6-1/220	Dadeville, AL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	597
Kendell Jones	DT	6-5/350	Killeen, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	93
Jamar King	DE	6-5/285	Detroit, MI	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	52*
Nigel Knott	CB	5-11/180	Madison, MS	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	62
Scott Lashley	OT	6-7/325	West Point, MS	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	192
Jared Mayden	CB	6-0/198	Sachse, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	147
Chris Owens	OG	6-3/315	Arlington, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	177
Aaron Robinson	CB	6-1/185	Deerfield Beach, FL	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	647
T.J. Simmons	WR	6-2/195	Pinson, AL	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	471
Irvin Smith	TE	6-4/235	New Orleans, LA	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	527
Jonah Williams	OT	6-5/290	Folsom, CA	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	17
Quinnen Williams	DT	6-4/265	Birmingham, AL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	159
Lyndell Wilson	OLB	6-2/240	Montgomery, AL	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	15

*junior college transfer

THE TIDE'S SECRET WEAPON

Alabama leads a growing trend in college football — expanded coaching staffs

BY DAVID FOX

A chance meeting with Alabama offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin in Atlanta in 2014 presented Keary Colbert with a tough decision.

Colbert, a standout receiver at USC from 2000-03 and an NFL wideout from 2004-11, was then the wide receivers coach at Georgia State when he attended a Georgia high school coaches' luncheon and bumped into Kiffin, a familiar face from his days with the Trojans.

Kiffin mentioned the possibility of Colbert joining Alabama as an "analyst." For Colbert, taking the position would mean leaving a full-time assistant coach job with a program that had just moved up to the FBS and the Sun Belt.

One path was traditional for a young assistant — a position coach with a fledgling program. The other was an off-field role with the premier power in the sport and the nation's top coach in Nick Saban.

Colbert chose Alabama, where he spent the 2014 and '15 seasons as an offensive analyst on a coaching and support staff that has grown to include eight analysts who work with nine position coaches and four graduate assistants.

"I had to make a decision to leave a full-time job and go to Alabama and learn from Coach Saban and learn from his program and people on his staff," Colbert says. "It was a growth opportunity for me to get underneath that umbrella and to use those experiences going forward."

Many programs have expanded their own support staffs in recent seasons. Colbert, for example, left Alabama to be an offensive administrative assistant at USC, one of four total administrative assistants on Clay Helton's staff.

Auburn had six analysts last season, including one hired away from Alabama. Jim Harbaugh's first staff at Michigan included five aides with some variation of the title "analyst." Florida State's staff last season included 12 assistants with the words "quality control" in their titles.

Whether teams call them analysts, quality control coaches or administrative assistants, the poster child of the practice is Alabama.

The Crimson Tide first had three members of their staff listed as analysts in 2010, then six in 2011 and 10 in 2012 before settling on eight in each of the last three seasons.

Their roles are a blend between graduate assistant and advance scout. Unlike a quality control position in the NFL or a graduate assistant in college, analysts are not among the group of coaches the NCAA allows to instruct players. Analysts and quality control coaches, like GAs, are not permitted to recruit. By NCAA rules, GAs also must be enrolled as graduate students, as the name suggests. Analysts do not need to be enrolled in classes.

"It's kind of taken to the pro format," Helton says of his staffing at USC. "When you look at the NFL, you have the first assistant and second assistant. You have a full-time coach who is actually coaching the position and a quality control that's getting a lot of the work done for the coach from a cut-up standpoint or computer standpoint. It's almost like he has his own assistant for meeting preparation."

Many former and current analysts at Alabama are similar to Colbert — young coaches looking to move up in the profession. Since 2010, most of Alabama's analysts have been previously graduate assistants or video coordinators in Tuscaloosa or elsewhere. Others were full-time assistants at the FCS level or high school coaches.

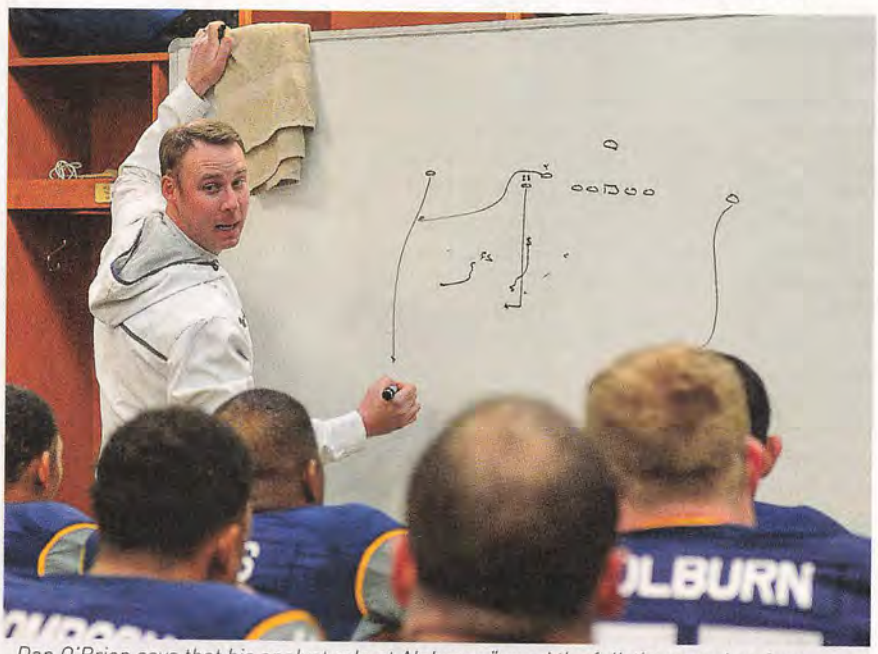
"The fact that we can have a few extra guys now to be analysts, to break down film, to do quality control-type work, I think as an entry level that is beneficial to some guys that can move on maybe to be graduate assistants, get on the field and get some coaching experience," Saban said during his team's preparations for the National Championship Game against Clemson.

Dan O'Brien joined the Alabama staff in 2007 as a graduate assistant after serving one season as scouting assistant intern with the New England Patriots and one season as a safeties coach at Harvard. When O'Brien, the son of former Boston College and NC State coach Tom O'Brien, finished his graduate work, Alabama wanted to keep him on the staff. The Tide added him in their first wave of analyst hires in 2010.

O'Brien describes the role as the college version of an NFL advance scout, reporting tendencies noticed on film.

"It saved the full-time coaches from doing a lot of extra stuff," says O'Brien, who is now the secondary coach at Navy. "You try to take a little off their plate and allow them to focus on the game-planning aspects of things."

Only three analysts were on the Alabama staff when O'Brien was there — he left Tuscaloosa to become the defensive backs coach at



Dan O'Brien says that his analyst role at Alabama "saved the full-time coaches from doing a lot of extra stuff" and cleared their plates for game-planning.

Colbert: Maya Dondonyan/USC Athletics; O'Brien: Phil Hoffmann/NAAA

Elon — but the role of analysts as extensions of the coaching staff was clear. O'Brien worked in conjunction with defensive coordinator Kirby Smart, who is now the head coach at Georgia.

"For my four years there I was Kirby's shadow, other than the on-the-field stuff," O'Brien says. "If Kirby needed something, I'd make sure it got done."

During his time as a high school coach in Mobile, former Alabama cornerback Kelvin Sigler had been trying to break into college coaching, and specifically with the Crimson Tide. He went after director of player development positions that were eventually filled by Jeremy Pruitt (now the defensive coordinator at Alabama) and Kevin Sherrer (now the outside linebackers coach at Georgia). Sigler's foot in the door was an analyst position in 2012. His job was to work closely with Pruitt, who by then had been promoted to defensive backs coach, on breaking down film and installing game plans.

"It doesn't put a lot on one GA or intern to break down film because you have so many guys who can do those things," says Sigler, who has been the linebackers coach at Northern Illinois and South Alabama since leaving his analyst position. "It speeds up the process with so many people you can depend on."

When Sigler was hired, he brought with him his longtime friend and assistant at Blount High School, Chris Samuels. An Outland Trophy winner at Alabama and a Pro Bowl tackle with the Washington Redskins, Samuels also was looking to break into coaching.

He took a graduate assistant position for two seasons, working on the sideline, holding up cards and signaling plays. After earning a degree, he moved to an analyst role installing the offense for the scout team.

Having a connection to Alabama or the coaching staff is a good way to get an analyst position, but old-fashioned hard work (and being cordial) landed Samuels as a graduate assistant and then as an analyst.

Samuels left college coaching to become the coach at Manassas (Va.) Osbourn High School.

Jules Montinar, a former player at Eastern Kentucky and graduate assistant at Purdue, didn't have any connection to Alabama other than seeing a job open up on FootballScoop.com. He sent a résumé and followed up several times and left a positive impression with Saban's administrative assistant Linda Leoni. When Smart and then-director of player of development Glenn Schumann were down to the final candidates, Leoni mentioned Montinar.

"Kirby called me and two days later I was on the plane interviewing," Montinar says. "The rest is history."

Montinar, who is now the cornerbacks coach at Texas State, ended up working closely with Saban. As other analysts worked side-by-side with assistants, Montinar drew the assignment of coaching cornerbacks with Saban.

"You've got to bring your 'A' game every time," Montinar says. "There's nowhere to hide."

Jake Peetz, a former walk-on at Nebraska who worked with the Jaguars and Redskins in quality control roles, also believes he got the job on hustle.

After Peetz was part of a staff that was fired in Jacksonville, he got clearance to visit from Smart. Peetz worked under Mike Mularkey in Jacksonville. Mularkey, the current coach for the Tennessee Titans, had been Saban's offensive coordinator for a year with the Miami Dolphins.

That shared connection, though, isn't the only reason Peetz believes he earned a spot working with Alabama's then-offensive coordinator Doug Nussmeier in 2013.

"I hope that he saw that I drove from Jacksonville to Alabama because I wanted to be there," says Peetz, who is now assistant quarterbacks coach with the Raiders. "I was a young guy who had a lot of energy and enthusiasm and wanted to learn the right way to do things."

Not all of Alabama's analysts have been up-and-coming head coaches. Some have been brought in for a specific purpose.

When Alabama wanted to refine the no-huddle, up-tempo elements of the offense in 2015, Saban and Kiffin approached Eric Kiesau, who had helped install tempo offenses at Washington and Cal. Kiesau had been the wide receivers coach at Kansas in 2014 and had intended on taking some time off before Alabama contacted him. Like some other analysts Alabama has hired, Kiesau could afford to take a pay cut from what he would make as a full-time assistant to be an analyst because he was still receiving buyout payments from Kansas. (CBSSports.com reported in January that analysts' salaries range from $23,462 to $47,409.)

Instead of serving as a quality control staffer or an assistant to a position coach, Kiesau described his role as a consultant.

Normally, coaches looking to tweak an offensive or defensive system would hire an outside coach full-time or would visit with another coaching staff for a teaching session.

In Kiesau, Alabama hired someone on staff to work on the transition in real time.

"If you wanted to [tweak an offense], you'd send your coordinator in the offseason to a team in the spring and visit for a couple of days, and they would take a bunch of notes and then take it back and incorporate that into their own system," Kiesau says. "That's why it was so invaluable for me to be there all day, every day, all year long because when things came up, it was 'How did you handle this?'"

Kiesau helped Alabama trim its playbook for an up-tempo system and work on play-call sheets. And like many analysts at Alabama, he used his position to learn about Saban's organization and system to apply it to future work. Kiesau returned to a full-time assistant role when he was hired as Fresno State's offensive coordinator this season.

Keary Colbert parlayed his experience with Lane Kiffin as an offensive analyst at Alabama into a job at his alma mater.

The analyst role also has been a valuable training ground for eventual full-time assistants at Alabama.

In 2014, Alabama hired former Cal and Washington defensive line coach Tosh Lupoi as an analyst. Lupoi was a highly regarded recruiter in the Pac-12 before he was at the center of an NCAA investigation that he paid for a recruit's tutoring. Neither Lupoi nor Washington was penalized, but the inquiry meant that he couldn't join Sarkisian at USC or stay with the Huskies.

Lupoi found a home at Alabama and was eventually promoted to serve as the Tide's outside linebackers coach.

Billy Napier served as offensive coordinator and other roles at Clemson until he was fired in 2010. He landed as an analyst at Alabama in 2011 and followed former Tide offensive coordinator Jim McElwain to Colorado State. Napier returned to Alabama as wide receivers coach in 2013.

The expanded coaching staff gives Alabama, in some ways, a minor league or training system for eventual assistants.

"Regardless of where they need to start professionally, I think this is a great thing for our profession, to be able to help develop coaches," Saban said in January. "And I think those guys now have created a role and a niche for themselves that's very important to every program because we all depend on them."

ARKANSAS RAZORBACKS

National Forecast: **26** /// *SEC West Prediction:* **4**

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	3	Louisiana Tech
Sept.	10	at TCU
Sept.	17	Texas State
Sept.	24	vs. Texas A&M #
Oct.	1	vs. Alcorn State %
Oct.	8	Alabama
Oct.	15	Ole Miss
Oct.	22	at Auburn
Nov.	5	Florida
Nov.	12	LSU
Nov.	19	at Mississippi State
Nov.	26	at Missouri

#Arlington, TX %Little Rock, AR

The Arkansas Razorbacks were a force in the second half of 2015, losing only a heartbreaker to Mississippi State on a blocked chip-shot field goal in the final minute during their final seven games. First-year offensive coordinator Dan Enos spurred quarterback Brandon Allen and a running game led by nation's largest line and tailback Alex Collins to a breakout season to overcome the loss of several key skill players.

Year 4 under Bret Bielema presents a big rebuild on offense with a new starting quarterback, three new offensive line starters and a revamped group of ball-carriers. It seems improbable for Arkansas to match its No. 5-ranked passing efficiency, its No. 15 third-down conversion percentage (.469) or its No. 29 total offense (465.5 ypg), so creating and leaning on a productive running game is ever more important to give the Razorbacks a shot in the rough-and-tumble SEC West.

Nine starters return on a defense that suffered a statistical fall-off from the nation's No. 10 unit in 2014 for coordinator Robb Smith. Arkansas struggled to generate a pass rush early against quick-release teams and was more hesitant to use aggressive man coverage. Led by linemen Deatrich Wise Jr. and Jeremiah Ledbetter, the Hogs expect to apply more heat to quarterbacks, forcing more mistakes and helping out a secondary that brings back six veterans for new position coach Paul Rhoads, who, like Enos, is a former head coach.

Arkansas, tripped up by non-conference opponents early last year, has a tough one in Week 2 at TCU after opening against Louisiana Tech. The Razorbacks' home slate is a who's who of preseason top-25 teams, with SEC division champions Alabama and Florida, plus Ole Miss and LSU. Arkansas went 3–1 in SEC road games in 2015. The Hogs will need a similar road run to have a shot at contending.

The program has seen a steady build in three seasons under Bielema, including bowl wins in back-to-back seasons for the first time in school history, but keeping that trend alive, given all the personnel fluctuations on offense, will require Bielema's best coaching job to date in the Ozarks.

DREW MORGAN

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 8-4, 5-3 SEC

In a familiar script, Arkansas closed the 2015 season with momentum on its side. The Razorbacks started 1–3 but won seven out of their last nine games, with the losses by 13 points at Alabama and one point to Mississippi State. Maintaining that momentum will require some new stars to emerge on offense due to the loss of quarterback Brandon Allen, tight end Hunter Henry, running back Alex Collins and three starters on the offensive line. The offense is likely to regress, but the defense should take a step forward with nine returning starters. Rebuilding in the rugged SEC West isn't easy, but Bret Bielema has built a solid foundation in Fayetteville. This program will remain relevant.

Postseason: Belk Bowl vs. North Carolina

QUARTERBACKS Junior Austin Allen, clearly the top performer at the position halfway through spring, was officially named the starter on April 14 after 10 practices. The brother of three-year starter Brandon Allen, the younger Allen has tended to be more of a risk-taker, which could lead to big plays as well as head-scratching mistakes. Enos and Bielema have been careful not to rule out a rise by Rafe Peavey, Ty Storey or Ricky Town, all of whom had flashes of premier playmaking in the spring. Town was a former four-star recruit who left USC after one semester and sat out last season at Arkansas as a transfer. Signee Cole Kelley, a 6'7" pocket passer, will get a look in the fall.

RUNNING BACKS A major transition is underway, and big back Kody Walker — who will be a sixth-year senior — will be coming off foot surgery from a mid-spring injury. Rawleigh Williams, who underwent neck surgery after a freak helmet-to-helmet shot against Auburn, did not practice with live tackling in the spring. Williams rushed for 254 yards in seven games as a

5-YEAR WIN TREND

Tim Umphrey

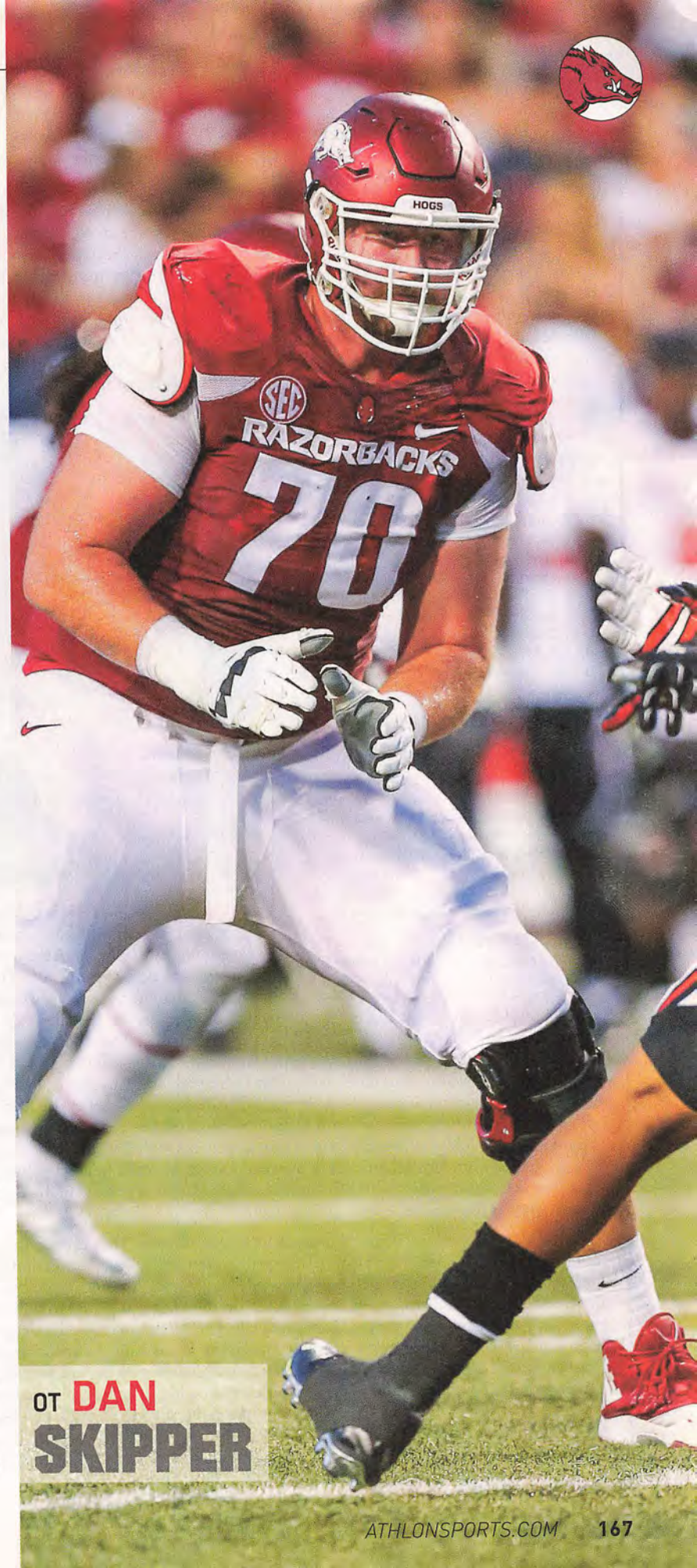
OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

MAKING THE CALL When Brandon Allen departed after passing for 3,440 yards and 30 touchdowns last season, the starting quarterback job at Arkansas was up for grabs for the first time since 2006. When it was all said and done, the open quarterback battle of 2016 ended without much drama, as coach Bret Bielema announced after the Razorbacks' 10th spring practice that Austin Allen would be the starter and thus replace his brother under center. The redshirt junior ran with the first unit throughout the spring practices, which were open to the media, and had the best performances over Rafe Peavey, Ty Storey and Ricky Town. Bielema announced Allen as starter with a press release, saying, "The fifth Arkansas edge is we EARN EVERYTHING. That is why today I announced to the team that Austin Allen is our starting quarterback."

WISE WORDS Defensive end Deatrich Wise Jr., who racked up seven sacks in the final five games as a reserve and finished with a team-high eight, has turned a corner with coach Bret Bielema. Previously, Bielema had said that Wise's extracurricular commitments were hampering his progress in football. Wise had his best winter as a Razorback, moved ahead of fellow senior JaMichael Winston at one starting end position and even got down time during some scrimmage work in the spring as a reward for his efforts at leadership. "The spring's gone really well," Wise said. "I've been working really hard to be the best player on the field. I'm just really enhancing everything, playing faster, doing more, studying more, listening better. I'm just really fine-tuning everything."

NEW RHOADS By hiring former Iowa State head coach Paul Rhoads as defensive backs coach, Bielema now has two former FBS head coaches on his staff. Offensive coordinator Dan Enos was head coach at Central Michigan for five seasons, from 2010-14. Rhoads says he would like to return to head coaching at some point, but for now he's ecstatic to be a position coach once again. The veteran Arkansas defensive backs expect to make major improvements. "He really gets on us about the little things, and we all know that's going to help us in the long run," safety Josh Liddell says. "He's very energetic." Safety Santos Ramirez says Rhoads is a stickler for alignment, eye control, discipline in progressions and finishing plays. "He's real stern, and he instills in us to be the best hardworking group out there," Ramirez says. "So Coach Rhoads has really been a great addition to this team, and it's going to make us jump crazy levels."

TOUGH BREAK Running back Kody Walker, who already lost long portions of three years due to leg injuries and a broken thumb, suffered a broken foot midway through spring drills that required surgery. The injury was expected to keep the projected starter out for as long as eight weeks, but he was scheduled to be back to full health early in the summer, according to Bielema. Walker, the leading returning rusher for Arkansas with 394 yards and six touchdowns, had stress fractures in both legs in 2011, a broken leg in 2012 and missed four games last year with the thumb injury.



OT **DAN SKIPPER**

true freshman and had 100 yards on 14 carries in the Hogs' win at Tennessee. Converted receiver Damon "Duwop" Mitchell, Denzell Evans and Juan Day got lots of prep in the spring under new assistant Reggie Mitchell. Blue-chip signee Devwah Whaley will join the mix in the fall, making for an interesting allotment of carries once the games get underway. Chris Jones is leading at fullback.

RECEIVERS It's a new day at a spot many projected as a weakness in 2015. An early injury to Keon Hatcher unleashed Drew Morgan, Dominique Reed and Jared Cornelius on the SEC, and they combined for 19 touchdown catches and 22 total touchdowns. Receivers coach Michael Smith turned down a big offer from LSU to remain on staff. Hatcher is back, as is Cody Hollister, who also had a foot injury. Veterans Eric Hawkins and Anthony Antwine and redshirts Deon Stewart and La'Michael Pettway help pad the loaded depth chart. The bounty of receivers could mean fewer sets with two tight ends, where veteran Jeremy Sprinkle is tutoring the nation's top class at the position from last year — Will Gragg, C.J. O'Grady and Austin Cantrell.

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	4	Keon Hatcher (Sr.)	**80**	**Drew Morgan (Sr.)**
WR	3	Dominique Reed (Sr.)	81	Cody Hollister (Sr.)
SLOT	1	Jared Cornelius (Jr.)	13	Deon Stewart (Fr.)
LT	74	Colton Jackson (Fr.)	62	Johnny Gibson (So.)
LG	51	Hjalte Froholdt (So.)	73	Deion Malone (Jr.)
C	**72**	**Frank Ragnow (Jr.)**	75	Zach Rogers (So.)
RG	60	Brian Wallace (So.)	79	Jalen Merrick (Fr.)
RT	**70**	**Dan Skipper (Sr.)**	64	Klint Harvey (Fr.)
TE	**83**	**Jeremy Sprinkle (Sr.)**	85	CJ O'Grady (Fr.)
QB	8	Austin Allen (Jr.)	2	Rafe Peavey (So.)
RB	24	Kody Walker (Sr.)	22	Rawleigh Williams (So.)

DEFENSE (9)

DE	48	Deatrich Wise Jr. (Sr.)	6	JaMichael Winston (Jr.)
NG	**94**	**Taiwan Johnson (Sr.)**	78	Bijhon Jackson (Jr.)
DT	**55**	**Jeremiah Ledbetter (Sr.)**	52	T.J. Smith (Fr.)
RUSH	**97**	**Tevin Beanum (Jr.)**	3	McTelvin Agim (Fr.)
MLB	**51**	**Brooks Ellis (Sr.)**	44	Kendrick Jackson (So.)
WLB	**23**	**Dre Greenlaw (So.)**	35	Dwayne Eugene (Jr.)
NB	**5**	**Henre' Toliver (Jr.)**	30	Kevin Richardson (Jr.)
CB	**29**	**Jared Collins (Sr.)**	15	Willie Sykes (So.)
CB	**2**	**D.J. Dean (Sr.)**	1	Ryan Pulley (So.)
SS	9	Santos Ramirez (So.)	20	De'Andre Coley (Jr.)
FS	**28**	**Josh Liddell (Jr.)**	8	Nate Dalton (Fr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	9	Cole Hedlund (So.)	KR	T.J. Hammonds (Fr.)
P	37	Toby Baker (Sr.)	PR	1 Jared Cornelius (Jr.)

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN Arkansas might have to cede its position as the biggest offensive line in America as it transitions to new assistant Kurt Anderson. Bielema and Anderson would like to see Frank Ragnow win the center job, where the heady 314-pounder can make the calls and run the show up front with veteran right tackle Dan Skipper, who has started 34 consecutive games. They are the only returning starters. Coveted 2014 signee Brian Wallace moved to Ragnow's old spot at right guard early in spring, but he was slowed by a concussion. Converted nose guard Hjalte Froholdt is now the first-team left guard. Redshirt freshman Colton Jackson is the surprise of the group, pointing toward a starting job at left tackle after he shared the reps with Wallace early in spring. Top contenders for jobs include Zach Rogers, Deion Malone, Johnny Gibson and Jalen Merrick. Taking pressure off the new quarterback with a consistent, ball-control ground game is imperative.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN Arkansas returns a bounty of veterans with experience on its four-man front. The belief is that the Hogs will be sound against the run and create more pressure against the pass to cut down on the alarming passing-game numbers they surrendered. Wise erupted with seven sacks in the final four games to finish with eight, all against SEC competition. Wise and JaMichael Winston provide a nice punch at one end spot. Tevin Beanum is the returning starter at rush end, but position coach Rory Segrest will likely work in blue-chip newcomer McTelvin Agim and Karl Roesler at that spot. Ledbetter moved from end to tackle to provide an agile, explosive interior presence a la Darius Philon in 2014. Taiwan Johnson returned to nose guard where he and Bijhon Jackson look to split reps, along with Armon Watts, who also backs up at Ledbetter's 3-technique spot with T.J. Smith. Arkansas had enough depth at end to move two younger players to offense, Jake Hall and Jamario Bell.

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH
Bret Bielema

RECORD AT SCHOOL
18-20 (3 years)

CAREER RECORD
86-44 (10 years)

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Dan Enos

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Robb Smith

LOCATION
Fayetteville, AR

STADIUM
Donald W. Reynolds Razorback Stadium (72,000)

KEY RAZORBACKS

JEREMIAH LEDBETTER, DL Explosive talent moving primarily to D-tackle from end to better exploit guards.

KEON HATCHER, WR He was on pace for a huge season — 13 catches for 198 yards and two TDs —before foot surgery derailed him after two games.

DEATRICH WISE JR., DE Wise blew up during the second half of 2015 to finish with eight sacks. Will be counted on for consistent production.

BROOKS ELLIS, LB Forced back to the middle early last year, Ellis racked up team-best 102 tackles.

DREW MORGAN, WR Plucky and undersized, Morgan erupted as a junior with 63 catches, 843 yards and 10 TDs. Had 100-plus yards in three SEC games.

KEY LOSSES

BRANDON ALLEN, QB Hometown product threw for 30 touchdowns — second-most ever at Arkansas — 3,440 yards and ranked fifth in the nation in QB rating.

ALEX COLLINS, RB Piled up school-record 20 rushing TDs and 1,577 rushing yards last year and finished with 3,703 yards in a productive three-year career in Fayetteville.

HUNTER HENRY, TE Mackey Award winner had 116 career catches for 1,661 yards in three years.

SEBASTIAN TRETOLA, OG Aggressive, nasty brawler in the pits allowed one sack in two seasons.

DENVER KIRKLAND, OT Soldiered through shoulder ailment at key left tackle spot. Declared for the NFL Drat.

RISING STAR

An under-the-radar in-state signee from Conway who redshirted last season, offensive tackle **Colton Jackson** worked with the first team at the critical left tackle spot for a big chunk of spring drills. Jackson's rise allowed the move of Brian Wallace to right guard.

Ledbetter: AP; Wise Crystal LoGiudice-USA TODAY Sports

2016 ARKANSAS ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
8	Allen, Austin	6-1/208	Jr.	Fayetteville, AR
2	Peavey, Rafe	6-2/203	So.	Bolivar, MO
5	Storey, Ty	6-2/216	Fr.	Charleston, AR
9	Town, Ricky	6-3/212	Fr.	Thousand Oaks, CA

RUNNING BACKS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
46	Carter, Damani	6-0/238	So.	Fayetteville, AR
39	Day, Juan	6-1/212	So.	North Little Rock, AR
34	Evans, Denzell	5-11/217	Jr.	Houston, TX
41	Jones, Chris	5-11/248	Jr.	DeQueen, AR
31	McPherson, Connor	5-7/210	Jr.	The Woodlands, TX
7	Mitchell, Damon	6-2/216	Jr.	Egg Harbor City, NJ
24	Walker, Kody	6-2/251	Sr.	Jefferson City, MO
22	Williams III, Rawleigh	5-10/224	So.	Dallas, TX

RECEIVERS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
20	Allison, Troy	6-1/198	So.	McGregor, TX
19	Antwine, Anthony	6-4/217	Jr.	Plano, TX
18	Colbert, Cameron	6-4/205	So.	Little Rock, AR
1	Cornelius, Jared	5-11/211	Jr.	Shreveport, LA
35	Dayton, Conner	5-11/160	Jr.	Pittsburg, KS
4	Hatcher, Keon	6-2/218	Sr.	Owasso, OK
14	Hawkins, Eric	5-11/175	Sr.	Longview, TX
81	Hollister, Cody	6-4/208	Sr.	Bend, OR
80	Morgan, Drew	6-0/195	Sr.	Greenwood, AR
28	Murad, Marty	5-9/194	Sr.	Dallas, TX
16	Pettway, La'Michael	6-2/205	Fr.	Nashville, AR
3	Reed, Dominique	6-3/175	Sr.	Camden, AR
82	Rossi, Luke	5-11/202	So.	Edmond, OK
13	Stewart, Deon	5-11/163	Fr.	Hardy, AR

TIGHT ENDS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
40	Bell, Jamario	6-5/261	Fr.	Junction City, AR
44	Cantrell, Austin	6-4/252	Fr.	Roland, OK
11	Gragg, Will	6-4/253	Fr.	Dumas, AR
87	Kraus, Jack	6-5/238	So.	Bentonville, AR
85	O'Grady, CJ	6-4/246	Fr.	Fayetteville, AR
83	Sprinkle, Jeremy	6-6/255	Sr.	White Hall, AR
86	Stettmeier, Howie	6-4/250	Fr.	Rogers, AR

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
51	Froholdt, Hjalte	6-4/309	So.	Svendborg, Denmark
62	Gibson, Johnny	6-4/343	So.	Dumas, AR
95	Hall, Jake	6-5/270	So.	Springdale, AR
71	Hannah, Jackson	6-2/286	So.	Bentonville, AR
64	Harvey, Klint	6-6/330	Fr.	Corning, AR
74	Jackson, Colton	6-6/302	Fr.	Conway, AR
73	Malone, Deion	6-3/295	Jr.	Batesville, MS
79	Merrick, Jalen	6-4/329	Fr.	Oak Hill, FL
72	Ragnow, Frank	6-5/314	Jr.	Chanhassen, MN
75	Rogers, Zach	6-1/303	So.	Carrollton, TX
70	Skipper, Dan	6-10/326	Sr.	Arvada, CO
61	Sone, Cooper	6-2/272	Fr.	Fayetteville, AR
60	Wallace, Brian	6-6/326	So.	Florissant, MO

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
3	Agim, McTelvin	6-3/288	Fr.	Hope, AR
97	Beanum, Tevin	6-4/270	Jr.	Forrest City, AR
98	Dean, Daytrieon	6-3/251	Fr.	Fort Smith, AR
18	Graham, Derrick	6-4/230	Fr.	Gainesville, FL
78	Jackson, Bijhon	6-2/332	Jr.	El Dorado, AR
94	Johnson, Taiwan	6-2/287	Sr.	Manvel, TX
55	Ledbetter, Jeremiah	6-3/276	Sr.	Orlando, FL
99	Lewis, Brandon	6-4/278	Sr.	Memphis, TN
90	Marks, Ke'Tyrus	6-2/298	Jr.	West Palm Beach, FL
96	Roesler, Karl	6-1/252	Jr.	Louisville, KY
52	Smith, T.J.	6-3/284	Fr.	Moultrie, GA
86	Watts, Armon	6-5/296	So.	St. Louis, MO
6	Winston, JaMichael	6-4/262	Jr.	Pritchard, AL
48	Wise Jr., Deatrich	6-5/280	Sr.	Carrollton, TX

LINEBACKERS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
51	Ellis, Brooks	6-2/248	Sr.	Fayetteville, AR
35	Eugene, Dwayne	6-1/234	Jr.	Marrero, LA
23	Greenlaw, Dre	6-0/231	So.	Fayetteville, AR
27	Hackett, Khalia	6-2/215	Jr.	Douglasville, GA
45	Harris, Josh	5-10/224	So.	Pine Bluff, AR
44	Jackson, Kendrick	6-1/250	So.	Haynesville, LA
34	Phillips, Tyler	6-1/222	Fr.	North Little Rock, AR
10	Ramsey, Randy	6-4/230	So.	Ft. Lauderdale, FL
47	Reynolds, Matt	6-1/218	So.	McKinney, TX
57	Thomas-Smith, Nicholas	5-10/225	Sr.	Chesterfield, MO
21	Williams, Josh	6-1/241	Sr.	Ft. Lauderdale, FL

DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
20	Coley, De'Andre	6-1/209	Jr.	Miami, FL
29	Collins, Jared	5-11/172	Sr.	Tulsa, OK
8	Dalton, Nate	6-3/204	Fr.	Baton Rouge, LA
2	Dean, DJ	5-11/195	Sr.	Newton, TX
26	Dodson, Matt	5-10/205	Jr.	McKinney, TX
39	Keaton, Byron	5-10/180	Fr.	Camden, AR
28	Liddell, Josh	6-1/210	Jr.	Pine Bluff, AR
24	Lucas, Ryder	6-0/192	So.	The Woodlands, TX
38	Miller, Reid	5-9/194	So.	Hollidaysburg, PA
1	Pulley, Ryan	5-11/194	So.	Fort Myers, FL
9	Ramirez, Santos	6-2/201	So.	Shreveport, LA
30	Richardson II, Kevin	6-0/170	Jr.	Jacksonville, AR
15	Sykes, Willie	6-0/185	So.	Houston, TX
5	Toliver, Henre'	6-1/181	Jr.	Marrero, LA

SPECIALISTS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
37	Baker, Toby (P)	6-3/212	Sr.	Memphis, TN
49	Decker, Robert (LS)	6-0/247	Jr.	Greenwich, CT
56	Emrich, Matt (LS)	6-3/195	Sr.	El Dorado, AR
9	Hedlund, Cole (K)	5-10/165	So.	Argyle, TX
8	Johnson, Blake (P)	6-0/184	Fr.	Long Beach, CA
43	Madden, George (LS)	6-1/225	Fr.	Blanchard, OK
48	McFain, Adam (K)	6-0/186	Sr.	Greenwood, AR
42	Saling, Lane (K)	5-8/164	Jr.	Owasso, OK

Scouting the RAZORBACKS

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP ARKANSAS

"Bret Bielema is following the Wisconsin model. His first priority is the offensive line, which is unique, and being really good at tailback. You can see the culture starting to take hold there, and there was a lot of culture rebuild he had to do. Those kids are really believing in what Bret's doing, and they have one of if not the best strength coach in the league, so all the pieces fit, and his coordinators are still with him so there's some stability. Now it's just a matter of whether they're talented enough to break through in the toughest division in football. ... They lost their stud tight end, the running back and the quarterback, so they'll be hard to replace. Brandon Allen really played well, but in my opinion he was just a guy from a talent standpoint. If they ever got a big-time quarterback, they could be scary good. They have some schematic advantages because of how they play. They're one of the harder teams to defend now because the league has changed so much. It's become more of a Texas A&M, Ole Miss offense-type league so it's hard to prepare for Arkansas. They still run two-back trap, still line up in two tight ends so you have to change the way you practice. They seem to get stronger as the year goes on because of how they play. When you're wearing out a little bit physically in November, that's the last team you want to see because they're not going to stop pounding it and they're just huge up front. If you can catch them early in the year when you're at full strength you have a better chance."

2015 RESULTS

RECORD: 8-5, 5-3 (SEC)

Sept.	5	UTEP		W	48-13
Sept.	12	vs. Toledo %		L	12-16
Sept.	19	Texas Tech		L	24-35
Sept.	26	vs. Texas A&M &	(ot)	L	21-28
Oct.	3	at Tennessee		W	24-20
Oct.	10	at Alabama		L	14-27
Oct.	24	Auburn	(ot)	W	54-46
Oct.	31	Tennessee-Martin		W	63-28
Nov.	7	at Ole Miss	(ot)	W	53-52
Nov.	14	at LSU		W	31-14
Nov.	21	Mississippi State		L	50-51
Nov.	27	Missouri		W	28-3
Jan.	2	vs. Kansas State #		W	45-23

%Little Rock &Arlington #Liberty Bowl

DEATRICH WISE

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Brandon Allen	370	244	3,440	30	8
Austin Allen	**3**	**1**	**35**	**1**	**0**

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Alex Collins	271	1,577	5.8	20
Kody Walker	**90**	**394**	**4.4**	**6**
Rawleigh Williams	**56**	**254**	**4.5**	**1**
Jared Cornelius	**7**	**112**	**16.0**	**2**

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Drew Morgan	**63**	**843**	**13.4**	**10**
Hunter Henry	51	739	14.5	3
Dominique Reed	**28**	**535**	**19.1**	**6**
Jeremy Sprinkle	**27**	**389**	**14.4**	**6**

KICKING: **Cole Hedlund, 9-15 FGs, 58-58 XPs, 85 points**

TACKLES: **Brooks Ellis, 102; Dre Greenlaw, 95**

SACKS: **Deatrich Wise, 8.0**

INTERCEPTIONS: **D.J. Dean, 2; Josh Liddell, 2**

Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	35.9 ppg	2	27
Rushing	197.3 ypg	4	34
Passing	268.2 ypg	3	32
Total	465.5 ypg	2	29
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**SEC**	**NATIONAL**
Scoring	27.4 ppg	12	68
Rushing	116.5 ypg	2	12
Passing	275.2 ypg	14	117
Total	391.6 ypg	11	58
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**SEC**	**NATIONAL**
+7	+0.54	4	28

BROOKS ELLIS

LINEBACKERS Providing relief for Brooks Ellis and Dre Greenlaw, who probably played as many snaps as any pair of linebackers in the Power 5 last year, will be a top priority. Ellis and Greenlaw, a true freshman in 2015, combined for 197 tackles. Khalia Hackett, who did not seize his opportunity to take over at middle linebacker last fall, has made big strides at Sam, the same spot where Randy Ramsey, who sat out 2015 with academic eligibility issues, works. Their presence might lead to more 4-3 looks after the Razorbacks ran more 4-2-5 in 2015. Kendrick Jackson returns to middle linebacker after a season at fullback to help with depth along with Dwayne Eugene and Josh Harris.

DEFENSIVE BACKS A shakeup on the staff followed a poor year of pass coverage, leading to the hiring of Rhoads. The former Iowa State head coach inherited a large group of veterans — including senior cornerbacks Jared Collins and D.J. Dean and juniors Josh Liddell, Henre'Toliver and Kevin Richardson. Rhoads provides an energetic presence and a booming voice, saying he relishes a return to his own position room. Dean missed spring drills after foot surgery, giving Toliver, the starting nickel back most of the last two years, more work at corner. The Razorbacks ranked No. 104 in pass defense efficiency and would like to get back to more press coverage. More effective run support from the safeties is also a priority, and Liddell and Santos Ramirez are both eager to attack, as is hard-hitting De'Andre Coley, who is projected to flourish under Rhoads. Richardson can play anywhere in the backfield. Ryan Pulley, Nate Dalton and Willie Sykes are top reserves.

SPECIALISTS After having five field goals blocked last season, the Razorbacks revamped their blocking scheme and execution in the spring. That's good news for Cole Hedlund, who is getting quicker lift on his kicks after going 9-of-15 last year. Adam McFain and Lane Saling are also in contention for placekicking and kickoffs. Toby Baker is primed for a big senior season after averaging 41.2 yards per punt in his first year as a starter. Baker looked sharp in refining his pooch punting during the spring. A big cast returned kickoffs last season, with Hawkins and Reed posting the best averages. Both are back. Cornelius and Dean both averaged 13.3 yards on the productive punt return unit, and either would make a good choice in 2016.

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	33.0	12
DEFENSE	28.0	29
MARGIN	+5.0	16
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	51.7%	2
DEFENSE	47.9%	119
MARGIN	+3.8%	44
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	6.8	12
DEFENSE	6.1	100
MARGIN	+0.7	36
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	5.3	5
DEFENSE	4.8	104
MARGIN	+0.5	44
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	-0.1	59
ACTUAL	7	27
MARGIN	+7.1	17

NUMBERS TO KNOW

KEY: 1-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

7.2 Arkansas averaged 7.2 yards per play on first down, ninth in the country and first in the SEC. Offensive coordinator Dan Enos was able to take advantage of opponents' fear of the run by giving Brandon Allen lots of play action opportunities. Allen responded with a high level of play: 87-of-127 on first downs for 1,338 yards, 10 touchdowns, no interceptions and a 183.0 passer rating.

65.5 Of the 29 fumbles that took place in Arkansas games in 2015, the Razorbacks recovered 19 of them. That 65.5 percent fumble recovery rate was the highest in the country. Over time, every team's recovery rate gravitates toward 50 percent, so this is typically a sign of good luck. With a normal number of fumble recoveries, Arkansas' turnover margin would have gone from plus-7 to closer to plus-2 or 3.

78.8 Among receivers targeted by at least 75 passes, none had a higher catch rate than Drew Morgan, who caught 63 of 80 passes (78.8 percent) and averaged 10.5 yards per target. Between Morgan and tight ends Hunter Henry and Jeremy Sprinkle, Arkansas had more efficiency options than almost anybody in college football.

47.9 Arkansas' offense was awesome by almost any definition, but the Razorbacks still went just 8–5. Why? Because the defense couldn't hold up its end of the bargain. They allowed a success rate of 47.9 percent, which ranked 119th in FBS and dead last in the SEC.

AP

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION

Defensive Linemen	4
Linebackers	4
Offensive Linemen	3
Defensive Backs	3
Wide Receivers	3
Running Backs	2
Quarterbacks	1
Tight Ends	1

BY STATE

Texas	5
Louisiana	4
Arkansas	3
Florida	2
Georgia	2
Mississippi	2
California	1
Iowa	1
Missouri	1

The Razorbacks' signing class was highlighted by defensive end McTelvin Agim and running back Devwah Whaley. However, the class includes the makings of a strong young front seven on defense and potential help in the near future on the offensive front, at tight end, receiver and the defensive backfield.

Agim, who goes by the nickname Sosa, enrolled early and even got in a few bowl practices, so he should be prepared to enter the rotation by the season opener. Junior college transfer Deion Malone also came aboard in January and should make the two-deep at guard. Offensive line signees Paul Ramirez and Jake Heinrich are well regarded and could also factor in the depth chart.

Arkansas wanted two pure tailbacks but landed one in Whaley, who comes with glowing credentials and a college-like frame, along with versatile T.J. Hammonds, who could play in the backfield or the slot. Receivers Kofi Boateng and Jordan Jones join a loaded group, so redshirting looks like an option. Hayden Johnson could wind up a long-term answer at fullback, and Grayson Gunter adds to the Hogs' solid collection of tight ends. Cole Kelley, a 6'7" quarterback, has an outstanding upside.

Agim, Briston Guidry, Austin Capps and late pickup Jonathan Marshall should end up being an outstanding group of defensive linemen. The same could be said for the four-man linebacker crew that helps a position of great need. De'Jon Harris and Giovanni LaFrance project as thumpers on the inside, while Alexy Jean-Baptiste and Dee Walker bring good speed and skills to the outside to round out the best Arkansas linebacker class in recent memory.

Junior college signee Britto Tutt, a 6'3" cornerback, came aboard after Signing Day to join safeties Deon Edwards and Micahh Smith.

SPOTLIGHT ON
MCTELVIN AGIM
DE • TEXARKANA, ARK.

McTelvin Agim graduated early from Hope (Ark.) High School last December and got in a few bowl practices as Arkansas prepared for the Liberty Bowl. Then Agim settled in for the real start of a Razorback career he hopes will lead to his graduation in three years.

The headstrong defensive end says his early start as a collegian was imperative. "I feel like it would have been a real difficult challenge for me trying to come up in June or July," Agim says. "It would have been hard for me to learn the plays ... and I would have been way behind."

In the spring, Agim worked at the rush end spot behind junior Tevin Beanum and as a first-team tackle in Arkansas' top pass-rush unit. Agim says he felt the need to prove he was worthy of the hype that was part of his recruitment and to earn his way on the field.

"I do feel like I've got to prove myself, because most of the D-line is seniors," he says. "They're not going to want me on the field if I can't compete with the best. So I feel like I have to come in and show that I can play right now and quick."

Arkansas coach Bret Bielema allows his early enrollees to return to their high schools for proms or other key functions, but Agim passed on that opportunity.

"I'm going to be up here working," Agim said in the spring. "I'm too busy. I'm on the grind. I've got to get it."

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
McTelvin Agim	DE	6-3/280	Texarkana, TX	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	18
Kofi Boateng	WR	6-1/183	Arlington, TX	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	657
Austin Capps	DT	6-4/320	Star City, AR	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	225
Deon Edwards	S	6-1/200	Clermont, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	865
Briston Guidry	DT	6-3/286	Metairie, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	299
Grayson Gunter	TE	6-6/233	Madison, MS	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,301
T.J. Hammonds	WR	5-11/195	Little Rock, AR	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	251
De'Jon Harris	ILB	6-0/240	Harvey, LA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	726
Jake Heinrich	OG	6-4/295	Urbandale, IA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	306
Alexy Jean-Baptiste	OLB	6-3/220	Pompano Beach, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	693
Hayden Johnson	FB	6-3/250	Columbia, MO	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,130
Jordan Jones	WR	6-3/180	Smackover, AR	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	537
Cole Kelley	QB	6-7/260	Lafayette, LA	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	874
Giovanni LaFrance	ILB	6-2/235	New Orleans, LA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	844
Deion Malone	OG	6-3/295	Batesville, MS	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	130*
Jonathan Marshall	DE	6-4/270	Shepherd, TX	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	632
Paul Ramirez	OT	6-5/275	Rialto, CA	★★★	NR	★★★	★★★	90*
Micahh Smith	S	6-1/197	Marshall, TX	★★★	NR	★★	★★★	1,921
Britto Tutt	CB	6-3/184	Augusta, GA	NR	NR	NR	NR	--
Dee Walker	OLB	6-2/210	Moultrie, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,421
Devwah Whaley	RB	6-0/210	Beaumont, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	96

*junior college transfer

AUBURN TIGERS

National Forecast: **35** /// *SEC West Prediction:* **6**

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	Clemson
Sept. 10	Arkansas State
Sept. 17	Texas A&M
Sept. 24	LSU
Oct. 1	UL Monroe
Oct. 8	at Mississippi State
Oct. 22	Arkansas
Oct. 29	at Ole Miss
Nov. 5	Vanderbilt
Nov. 12	at Georgia
Nov. 19	Alabama A&M
Nov. 26	at Alabama

The disappointment and downward trend under Gus Malzahn in 2015 has led to multiple changes on and off the field, but it's the addition of five new assistant coaches — as well as the all-important quarterback position — that likely will determine whether 2016 is a success.

On defense, Auburn has a new coordinator (Kevin Steele), secondary coach (Wesley McGriff) and linebackers coach (Travis Williams). Meanwhile, the first offensive changes in the four-year Malzahn era have led to the additions of former Auburn player Kodi Burns as the receivers coach and Herb Hand as the offensive line coach.

But players ultimately decide the results on the field, and the issues last season can be tracked to the quarterback position. Quarterback play should once again prove to be the difference this season — and should help determine whether Malzahn will see a fifth year as the coach on the Plains.

The Tigers were relatively young last season, and the experience of a difficult season — along with an influx of talent — should make this a stronger team in 2016.

RUDY FORD

QUARTERBACKS Jeremy Johnson was billed as the next big thing last season and was among the Heisman Trophy favorites in the preseason, but his meltdown (six interceptions in the first three games) resulted in an ineffective offense and led Malzahn to look for answers on the junior college level — again. For the third time in Malzahn's coaching career at Auburn, he might turn to a junior college newcomer to lead his offense. John Franklin III is the lone dual-threat quarterback with experience on the roster, and while Johnson and six-game starter Sean White wore non-contact jerseys in a major spring scrimmage, coaches put Franklin through the ringer to see if he could handle the heat and show off his speed as plays broke down. More important, can Franklin make the right decisions in a zone-read offense? He is being compared to Nick Marshall, who rushed for more than 1,000 yards and led the Tigers to an SEC title in 2013, but it remains to be seen if the former Florida State quarterback — he emulated Marshall in BCS practices that year — can live up to the hype and overtake two veterans. "He is eager to learn everything inside and out, but it's a process," Malzahn says. "We throw a lot at our quarterbacks, and he's trying his best to take everything in. I think he's responding well." Incoming freshman Woody Barrett also will get an opportunity to win the starting job in the fall. Simply put, no one knows who will start the season opener against Clemson.

RUNNING BACKS Jovon Robinson emerged as the go-to running back late last season and subsequently put up impressive numbers, with 90 yards or more in five of the last six games. The former junior college transfer should be the starter heading into the season opener, but coaches say to not count out Roc Thomas, who shared first-team reps in the spring with the presumed starter. Robinson had issues with his attitude last preseason, which bumped him down the depth chart for most of the year. It seems he has overcome those issues and is set to stretch Auburn's

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 6-6, 3-5 SEC

The Tigers have been trending in the wrong direction since recording a 12–2 mark in 2013. Auburn is a combined 15–11 over the last two seasons and slipped to 2–6 in the SEC last year. Gus Malzahn is regarded as one of the SEC's top offensive coaches, but the Tigers averaged only 22.1 points in league contests last fall. Getting the offense back on track is Malzahn's biggest priority this offseason, but there's uncertainty at quarterback and a lack of proven receivers. New coordinator Kevin Steele inherits a talented defensive line, but question marks remain in the back seven. Even though Malzahn has recruited well, there are too many question marks on offense to expect significant improvement in 2016. **Postseason: Music City Bowl vs. Wisconsin**

5-YEAR WIN TREND

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

THE JOKESTER Not many coaches can get away with making jokes at the expense of Gus Malzahn, but close friend and new offensive line coach Herb Hand has some leeway. The two coaches were co-coordinators at Tulsa in 2007 and '08, and their personalities are on opposite sides of the spectrum. Malzahn admits to not understanding some of Hand's jokes, but the nicknames the offensive line coach has given the head coach — Jimmy Neutron, Boy Genius — have stuck, even if Hand says he just calls his new boss "Coach Malzahn" these days. "I've got nothing but love for the guy," says Hand, who spent the last five seasons with James Franklin at Vanderbilt and Penn State. "He's kinda got a nerdy cool about him that I love."

OFFENSIVE CHANGES Auburn bragged about its consistency year-to-year on offense, but the second-worst season of Malzahn's 10 years calling plays directly and indirectly led to some changes on the staff for the first time. Hand replaces one of the SEC's best offensive line coaches (J.B. Grimes), and Malzahn had to look for someone familiar with his system to step into Dameyune Craig's shoes after Craig surprisingly bolted for LSU only 11 days after Signing Day in February. The result is a more hands-on Malzahn, who moved from position to position in practices during the spring.

MAN OF STEELE Kevin Steele has not coached a top-10 defense in his five years as a coordinator, but the veteran assistant who left LSU after one season believes he has the pieces to make Auburn elite. Auburn hasn't been near the top 10 since 2007, and the revolving door of defensive assistants hasn't helped. The one-time Clemson assistant left the Tigers after his defense gave up 70 points to West Virginia in the 2012 Orange Bowl. There is hope, however, for an Auburn defense that improved as last season progressed under Will Muschamp. Texas A&M scored one touchdown, and the Tigers ended the season allowing no offensive touchdowns in a win against Memphis in the Birmingham Bowl. Confidence is brewing among defensive players, but it remains to be seen if Steele is the man to keep the good vibes flowing. "I know how I am, and I am not going to get into assessing Will," Steele says. "We're good friends. Obviously, there are some philosophical things defensively that we speak the same language, so in terms of terminology, there are a lot of similarities. As far as coaching styles, that's up to somebody else."

CRIME DAWG The man responsible for helping Ole Miss break through with an incredible recruiting class that included Robert Nkemdiche is back in college football, and he's an Auburn Man. Wesley "Crime Dawg" McGriff will coach the secondary after spending the last three seasons with the New Orleans Saints. He's known as one of the best recruiters in the country and should help the Tigers' efforts in Atlanta and South Florida. What is his weakness on the recruiting trail? "Weakness? Man, I don't have no weakness," he says. "No, I'm just kidding. I think my biggest asset in terms of recruiting is I love people."

OL **BRADEN SMITH**

SEC-record streak to eight years with at least one 1,000-yard rusher. The question is how Thomas, newcomer Malik Miller and fullbacks/H-Backs Kamryn Pettway and Chandler Cox fit into the rotation. The unexpected departure of Peyton Barber to the NFL in January left the Tigers scrambling for depth in the spring, but talent is not an issue in Auburn's backfield. Robinson could be poised for an All-SEC season if he's provided the bulk of the carries. The issue? Auburn's coaches usually wait a few weeks into the season before settling on a starter, meaning carries could be split through the first two or three games.

RECEIVERS This is the most inexperienced and unproven position on the offense. The Tigers must replace Ricardo Louis and his team-high 716 yards — no one else on the team had more than 300 receiving yards. Seniors Marcus Davis and Tony Stevens need to step up, but neither has provided a consistent threat in his three previous seasons. Flashes of brilliance were apparent in the spring, but it appears Burns — the new position coach — will lean on several newcomers to contribute, including Nate Craig-Myers, the crown jewel of the incoming class. Kyle Davis, another highly touted signee, arrived on campus in January, but a shoulder injury limited him. He looks the part and is expected to contribute immediately. "It's really good that we're young because I get to mold them the way I want to and they don't know any better right now," Burns says.

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	8	Tony Stevens (Sr.)		Nate Craig-Myers (Fr.)
WR	80	**Marcus Davis (Sr.)**	11	Kyle Davis (Fr.)
WR	4	Jason Smith (Jr.)	83	Ryan Davis (So.)
LT	70	Robert Leff (Sr.)	73	Austin Golson (Jr.)
LG	63	**Alex Kozan (Sr.)**	77	Marquel Harrell (Fr.)
C	73	**Austin Golson (Jr.)**	52	Xavier Dampeer (Sr.)
RG	71	**Braden Smith (Jr.)**	64	Mike Horton (Fr.)
RT	78	Darius James (Jr.)	70	Robert Leff (Sr.)
HB	27	**Chandler Cox (So.)**	36	Kamryn Pettway (So.)
QB	5	John Franklin III (Jr.)	6	**Jeremy Johnson (Jr.)**
RB	29	Jovon Robinson (Sr.)	9	Roc Thomas (Jr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	9	Byron Cowart (So.)	3	Marlon Davidson (Fr.)
DT	1	**Montravius Adams (Sr.)**	90	Maurice Swain (Sr.)
DT	95	**Dontavius Russell (So.)**	94	Devaroe Lawrence (Sr.)
DE	55	Carl Lawson (Jr.)	4	Jeff Holland (So.)
SLB	30	Tre' Williams (Jr.)	49	Darrell Williams (So.)
MLB		T.J. Neal (Sr.)	30	Tre' Williams (Jr.)
WLB	57	Deshaun Davis (So.)	48	Montavious Atkinson (So.)
CB	6	**Carlton Davis (So.)**	26	John Broussard Jr. (Fr.)
CB	12	Jamel Dean (Fr.)		Marshall Taylor (Sr.)
SS	28	**Tray Matthews (Jr.)**	14	Stephen Roberts (Jr.)
FS	23	**Rudy Ford (Sr.)**	19	Nick Ruffin (Jr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	38	Daniel Carlson (Jr.)	KR	80 Marcus Davis (Sr.)
P	91	Kevin Phillips (Sr.)	PR	23 Rudy Ford (Sr.)

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN Auburn loses its two best offensive linemen — tackles Shon Coleman and Avery Young — but several key pieces return, and transfer Darius James is eligible after sitting out a season after leaving Texas. The interior of the line should be strong, though center Austin Golson could move to left tackle to make room for career backup Xavier Dampeer to become the man snapping the ball. It might prove to be the best move for the Tigers, especially as questions abound about Robert Leff's ability to be an SEC starter throughout an entire season at left tackle. Auburn has been blessed with strong left tackles in Malzahn's tenure, but this might be the weakest season yet at the position, so don't be surprised if Golson's move proves to be permanent. Overall, the line is deep, but two key spots need solid starters to emerge who can stay on the field for 60-plus plays a game. The well-traveled Hand, who spent the last two years at Penn State, will have some tough decisions to make in August.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN Auburn received great news with defensive end Carl Lawson's and tackle Montravius Adams' decisions to stay in school rather than jump into the NFL. The Tigers' defensive front is as deep as it has been in the Malzahn era, but will it translate into success? Auburn ranked 13th in the SEC in sacks last season with only 1.46 per game. The defense showed noticeable improvement later in the season — allowing one total offensive touchdown against Texas A&M and Memphis was impressive — but quarterbacks often had too much time to sit in the pocket and deliver big throws. Auburn has the talent to be one of the top three fronts in the SEC, but

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH
Gus Malzahn

RECORD AT SCHOOL
27-13 (3 years)

CAREER RECORD
36-16 (4 years)

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Rhett Lashlee

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Kevin Steele

LOCATION
Auburn, AL

STADIUM
Jordan-Hare Stadium (87,451)

KEY TIGERS

JOVON ROBINSON, RB Robinson entered 2015 with high expectations but didn't live up to the hype until the final third of the season. He averaged 5.5 yards per carry.

CARL LAWSON, DE He missed six-plus games with an injured hip and wasn't 100 percent when he returned, but the projected first- or second-rounder is back for his junior season and will change how offenses attack the Auburn defense.

MONTRAVIUS ADAMS, DT His 44 tackles led all defensive linemen last season. Adams flirted with the NFL but came back to Auburn to lead a defensive resurgence.

CARLTON DAVIS, CB The Freshman All-SEC pick led Auburn with three interceptions. Davis should be one of the top corners in the league in 2016.

TRE' WILLIAMS, LB Williams is the most experienced linebacker returning on the roster. He'll be asked to lead the next wave of Auburn backers.

KEY LOSSES

PEYTON BARBER, RB Surprised everyone by jumping to the NFL after rushing for 1,017 yards and 13 touchdowns as a sophomore.

SHON COLEMAN, OL Auburn's top offensive tackle opted for the NFL Draft and will be difficult to replace.

AVERY YOUNG, OL Perhaps the best pulling guard — and versatile lineman — on Auburn's roster left for the NFL.

JONATHAN JONES, CB Jones didn't have the success of his junior season, but Auburn will miss his team-leading 13 pass breakups.

CASSANOVA MCKINZY, LB Solid four-year contributor led Auburn with 10 tackles for a loss in 2015.

RISING STAR

Defensive end **Byron Cowart** came to Auburn as the nation's top prospect last season, but he struggled to make a difference. He played in 13 games but recorded only six tackles. Cowart still has the skill set that made him a coveted recruit, and coaches are confident that he is ready to break out as a sophomore.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 AUBURN ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
16 Adams, Devin	6-2/247	Jr.	Mobile, AL
5 Franklin III, John	6-1/174	Jr.	Ft. Lauderdale, FL
6 Johnson, Jeremy	6-5/240	Sr.	Montgomery, AL
15 Queen, Tyler	6-1/241	Fr.	Kennesaw, GA
13 White, Sean	6-0/200	So.	Boca Raton, FL

RUNNING BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
43 Chambers, Cedric	5-7/190	So.	Valley, AL
27 Cox, Chandler	6-1/232	So.	Apopka, FL
84 Cramer, Chase	5-10/204	Fr.	Orlando, FL
40 Govan, Eugene	5-7/185	So.	Grovetown, GA
21 Johnson, Kerryon	6-0/195	So.	Madison, AL
30 Lewis, Damian	5-9/208	Sr.	Wetumpka, AL
32 Miller, Malik	5-11/218	Fr.	Huntsville, AL
39 Muschamp, Robert	6-1/236	Fr.	Rome, GA
36 Pettway, Kamryn	6-0/242	So.	Montgomery, AL
29 Robinson, Jovon	6-0/230	Sr.	Memphis, TN
42 Sweeney, Keenan	6-0/238	So.	Snellville, GA
9 Thomas, Roc	5-10/203	Jr.	Oxford, AL
45 Tolbert, C.J.	5-7/193	So.	Dadeville, AL

RECEIVERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
82 Berryman, Pete	6-5/214	So.	Birmingham, AL
86 Coburn, Clay	6-1/209	Jr.	Auburn, AL
11 Davis, Kyle	6-2/208	Fr.	Loganville, GA
80 Davis, Marcus	5-9/180	Sr.	Boynton Beach, FL
83 Davis, Ryan	5-9/164	So.	St. Petersburg, FL
89 King, Griffin	5-10/173	Fr.	Atlanta, GA
37 Rice, Logan	6-0/208	So.	Rome, GA
47 Schaum, Chase	5-10/187	So.	Tallahassee, FL
81 Slayton, Darius	6-2/182	Fr.	Norcross, GA
4 Smith, Jason	6-1/180	Jr.	Mobile, AL
8 Stevens, Tony	6-4/205	Sr.	Orlando, FL
29 Stovall, Tyler	6-1/207	Jr.	Hokes Bluff, AL
10 Truitt, Stanton	5-9/184	So.	Atlanta, GA

TIGHT ENDS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
41 Hall, Greg	6-3/248	Sr.	Athens, GA
85 Harris, Jalen	6-4/250	So.	Montgomery, AL
44 Rice, Landon	6-5/246	Fr.	Rome, GA

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
65 Brown, Tucker	6-3/265	So.	Trussville, AL
67 Carr, Tyler	6-5/313	Fr.	Southside, AL
52 Dampeer, Xavier	6-2/305	Sr.	Mendenhall, MS
76 Diamond, Jordan	6-4/304	Sr.	Chicago, IL
73 Golson, Austin	6-5/304	Jr.	Prattville, AL
77 Harrell, Marquel	6-3/325	Fr.	Fairburn, GA
64 Horton, Mike	6-4/312	Fr.	Atlanta, GA
78 James, Darius	6-4/332	Jr.	Killeen, TX
54 Kim, Kaleb	6-4/284	Fr.	Buford, GA
63 Kozan, Alex	6-4/300	Sr.	Castle Rock, CO
70 Leff, Robert	6-6/288	Sr.	Fairhope, AL
61 Meneely, Ryan	6-1/310	Fr.	McDonough, GA
75 Mix, Deon	6-4/301	Jr.	Batesville, MS
66 Sharp, Bailey	6-5/293	Fr.	Marietta, GA
71 Smith, Braden	6-6/286	Jr.	Olathe, KS

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
1 Adams, Montravius	6-4/296	Sr.	Vienna, GA
93 Carter, Tyler	6-1/243	Fr.	Decatur, AL
9 Cowart, Byron	6-3/277	So.	Seffner, FL
3 Davidson, Marlon	6-3/281	Fr.	Greenville, AL
96 Garrison, Aaron	6-2/278	Jr.	Ozark, AL
4 Holland, Jeff	6-2/240	So.	Jacksonville, FL
52 Jackson Jr., Antwuan	6-2/308	Fr.	Ellenwood, GA
62 Johnson, Jaunta'vius	6-2/322	Fr.	Lincoln, AL
59 Kennion, Raashed	6-6/235	Jr.	Jacksonville, FL
94 Lawrence, Devaroe	6-2/281	Sr.	Greenville, SC
55 Lawson, Carl	6-2/257	Jr.	Alpharetta, GA
95 Russell, Dontavius	6-3/295	So.	Carrollton, GA
90 Swain, Maurice	6-5/295	Sr.	LaGrange, GA
98 Tega Wanogho, Prince	6-8/250	Fr.	Elmore, AL
92 Thomas-Thornton, Justin	6-5/228	So.	Prichard, AL
97 Walker, Gary	5-11/247	Fr.	Toccoa, GA
79 Williams, Andrew	6-4/270	So.	McDonough, GA

LINEBACKERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
48 Atkinson, Montavious	6-1/183	So.	Fairburn, GA
57 Davis, Deshaun	5-11/236	So.	Prichard, AL
10 James III, Paul	6-4/258	Jr.	Miami, FL
46 King, Caleb	6-3/214	Jr.	Huntsville, AL
51 McBryde, Richard	6-1/227	Fr.	Troy, AL
50 Ritter, Chase	5-10/189	Jr.	Wetumpka, AL
58 Shockley, Josh	5-10/215	So.	McDonough, GA
39 Sibley, Conner	5-10/201	Fr.	Athens, GA
56 Thomas, Jackson	5-11/218	Sr.	Birmingham, AL
42 Threat, Tre'	6-0/246	Fr.	Geneva, AL
47 Toney, Cameron	6-1/243	Jr.	Huntsville, AL
49 Williams, Darrell	6-2/234	So.	Hoover, AL
30 Williams, Tre'	6-2/238	Jr.	Mobile, AL

DEFENSIVE BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
11 Boston, Markell	6-0/200	So.	Newnan, GA
26 Broussard Jr., John	5-11/163	Fr.	Phenix City, AL
6 Davis, Carlton	6-1/190	So.	Miami, FL
31 Davis, Javaris	5-10/180	Fr.	Jacksonville, FL
13 Davis, T.J.	6-0/200	Sr.	Tallahassee, FL
12 Dean, Jamel	6-2/205	Fr.	Cocoa, FL
20 Dinson, Jeremiah	5-11/172	So.	Miami, FL
25 Dupper, Austin	5-9/179	Sr.	Decatur, AL
23 Ford, Rudy	6-0/203	Sr.	Big Cove, AL
15 Holsey, Joshua	5-11/198	Sr.	Fairburn, GA
46 Hood, Ben	5-8/174	So.	Atlanta, GA
22 Irvin, Tim	5-9/194	So.	Miami, FL
44 Lester, Raymond	5-11/156	So.	Marietta, GA
28 Matthews, Tray	6-1/213	Jr.	Newnan, GA
14 Roberts, Stephen	5-11/187	Jr.	Opelika, AL
19 Ruffin, Nick	6-0/191	Jr.	Duluth, GA
36 Sherwood, Michael	5-9/168	Jr.	Riverdale, GA
Taylor, Marshall	6-2/199	Sr.	Cordele, GA

SPECIALISTS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
49 Bjork, Jack (P)	6-1/200	Jr.	Dallas, TX
38 Carlson, Daniel (K)	6-4/213	Jr.	Colorado Springs, CO
33 Hastings, Will (K)	5-10/165	So.	Little Rock, AR
51 Parslow, Jonathan (LS)	6-1/204	Jr.	Daphne, AL
91 Phillips, Kevin (P)	6-0/185	Sr.	Greenwood, MS
69 Powell, Ike (LS)	6-3/244	Jr.	Tifton, GA
43 Shannon, Ian (K/P)	6-3/209	Fr.	Marietta, GA
60 Spivey, Drew (LS)	6-2/235	Fr.	Louisville, AL
45 Taylor, Thomas (K/P)	6-0/180	So.	Spain Park, AL
68 Wade, Zach (LS)	5-10/205	So.	Bremen, GA

Scouting the TIGERS

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP AUBURN

"They still don't have the quarterback issue settled. That's the most apparent thing. ... I think they're better on the offensive line than what they're given credit for. It will be interesting to see how the new guy does because J.B. Grimes was pretty well respected in the league as a good offensive line coach. He might have gotten more out of those guys than they were capable of. You watched them play Alabama, and they got movement on the interior where generally that never happened against that front. But they didn't get some of the credit they deserved up front because they were so bad at quarterback. I was really shocked that you never saw anybody step up for their offense. Sean White, he probably had a chance to develop if he wasn't hurt for most of the second half. He probably got thrown into the fire too early because Jeremy Johnson wasn't a player at all. The juco kid [John Franklin III] they're bringing in might be more of a Nick Marshall-type, but I think you saw last year how underrated he was. You can talk about system all you want, but you've got to have a trigger man. ... They were better defensively and played harder for Will Muschamp, but now they've got a third coordinator in three years, so how does that play out?"

2015 RESULTS

RECORD: 7-6, 2-6 (SEC)

Sept.	5	vs. Louisville %	W	31-24
Sept.	12	Jacksonville State (ot)	W	27-20
Sept.	19	at LSU	L	21-45
Sept.	26	Mississippi State	L	9-17
Oct.	3	San Jose State	W	35-21
Oct.	15	at Kentucky	W	30-27
Oct.	24	at Arkansas (ot)	L	46-54
Oct.	31	Ole Miss	L	19-27
Nov.	7	at Texas A&M	W	26-10
Nov.	14	Georgia	L	13-20
Nov.	21	Idaho	W	56-34
Nov.	28	Alabama	L	13-29
Dec.	30	Memphis	W	31-10

%Atlanta #Birmingham Bowl

CARL LAWSON

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Jeremy Johnson	**157**	**95**	**1,054**	**10**	**7**
Sean White	**143**	**83**	**1,166**	**1**	**4**

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Peyton Barber	238	1,017	4.3	13
Jovon Robinson	**117**	**639**	**5.5**	**3**
Roc Thomas	**43**	**261**	**6.1**	**1**
Kerryon Johnson	**52**	**208**	**4.0**	**3**
Ricardo Louis	29	158	5.4	1

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Ricardo Louis	46	716	15.6	3
Marcus Davis	**30**	**181**	**6.0**	**1**
Melvin Ray	20	279	13.9	2

KICKING: Daniel Carlson, 23-27 FGs, 40-40 XPs, 109 points

TACKLES: Rudy Ford, 118; Kris Frost, 96

SACKS: Cassanova McKinzy, 5.0

INTERCEPTIONS: Carlton Davis, 3

Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	27.5 ppg	8	75
Rushing	196.4 ypg	5	35
Passing	173.6 ypg	12	111
Total	370.0 ypg	10	94

DEFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	26.0 ppg	11	54
Rushing	182.7 ypg	11	81
Passing	222.5 ypg	11	63
Total	405.2 ypg	13	71

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
+2	+0.15	8	51

MONTRAVIUS ADAMS

will it actually happen? Lawson struggled through a hip injury last season, and now that he's healthy, life should be much easier for the group as a whole. Devaroe Lawrence, Dontavius Russell, Maurice Swain and newcomer Paul James III are undervalued stars, too, and figure to have their big moments this season in Steele's attacking defense.

LINEBACKERS How do you replace the production of three former starters who combined for 601 tackles during their careers? Well, you turn to one returning veteran, count on an unproven player like Deshaun Davis and hope Illinois graduate transfer T.J. Neal lives up to the hype and can handle things at middle linebacker. The key is Tre'Williams, who returns after an impressive sophomore season, but now he's suddenly the leader on and off the field. While Auburn's former three starters were always trusted by coaches, they were not overly impressive. They missed gaps, tackles and assignments in crucial moments. Auburn might actually be better at a position many consider to be the weak link heading into the season.

DEFENSIVE BACKS Auburn loses All-SEC cornerback Jonathan Jones but returns interceptions leader Carlton Davis, a Freshman All-SEC selection, to lead the group. Auburn likely will lean on Ohio State transfer Jamel Dean, who has yet to play college football, at field cornerback, and another transfer, Marshall Taylor from Miami (Ohio), could factor into the mix quickly, too. The most experience returns at safety with Tray Matthews, Rudy Ford and Josh Holsey. Matthews underwent shoulder surgery in the offseason but should be full speed for the fall. This group, maybe more than the linebackers, has a lot of questions to answer — and yet it's the group getting the least amount of attention among naysayers. Production suffered last season, and many of the same moving parts return.

SPECIALISTS Special teams have always seemed to be a strength at Auburn, and that should be the case again. Daniel Carlson, who drilled four 50-yard field goals last season, returns as one of the SEC's top kickers. Overall, he made 23-of-27 attempts last season. Punter should be in good hands with the emergence of Kevin Phillips (41.0-yard average, 17 inside the 20-yard line). Meanwhile, Auburn is set in the return game. Davis averaged 11.9 yards per return on punts, and Ford (28.6 ypr) and Kerryon Johnson (27.6 ypr) will be the two speedsters returning kickoffs.

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	31.1	43
DEFENSE	30.4	83
MARGIN	+0.7	60
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	44.3%	36
DEFENSE	44.6%	97
MARGIN	-0.3%	70
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	5.4	86
DEFENSE	5.4	47
MARGIN	+0.0	75
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	4.7	45
DEFENSE	4.0	33
MARGIN	+0.7	32
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	2.8	29
ACTUAL	2	51
MARGIN	-0.8	85

NUMBERS TO KNOW

KEY: 1-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

0.0 On a per-play basis, Auburn simply couldn't pull away from opponents. The Tigers' yardage margin was 0.0 yards per play, 75th in FBS and 11th in the SEC. They averaged just 5.4 yards per play (86th in FBS) and allowed 5.4 (47th). Slight defensive improvement (they allowed 5.7 per play in 2014) couldn't offset significant offensive regression.

76.7 Despite getting far fewer rushes from the quarterback position, Auburn's intentions were still obvious. The Tigers rushed 76.7 percent of the time on standard downs (first downs, second-and-7 or less, third- or fourth-and-4 or less). That was the eighth-highest standard downs rushing rate in the country; among power conference teams, only Georgia Tech, with its spread option, was higher.

44.6 The defense's output technically improved, but it came mostly via big-play prevention: After allowing 68 gains of 20-plus yards in 2014 (103rd in FBS), the Tigers allowed just 50 (33rd). For that matter, they allowed just 15 gains of 30-plus (fifth). But from an efficiency standpoint, the Tigers were still below average. They allowed a success rate of 44.6 percent, 97th in FBS and 12th in the SEC.

9 Vegas was constantly overestimating Auburn in 2015. The Tigers came up short of the spread in nine of their 12 games against FBS competition (a total that doesn't include the Jacksonville State game) and came up at least nine points short of the line in four of those nine games.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION

Defensive Linemen	5
Defensive Backs	4
Wide Receivers	4
Linebackers	2
Offensive Linemen	2
Athletes	1
Quarterbacks	1
Running Backs	1
Tight Ends	1

BY STATE

Florida	8
Georgia	6
Alabama	5
North Carolina	1
Ohio	1

Auburn signed a relatively small recruiting class of 21, but it was heavy on immediate impact players on the defensive line and at receiver.

At least two of the four-man receiving class figure to see the field as true freshmen. Nate Craig-Myers, a four-star signee, and early enrollee Kyle Davis were the highest rated of the group. Craig-Myers, a Florida native, was ranked the No. 6 player at his position in the nation by the 247Sports Composite. Davis, from Georgia, was also in the top 10.

Four-star defensive end Marlon Davidson caught Gus Malzahn's eye in the spring, and his quickness could lead to playing time. Meanwhile, defensive tackle Derrick Brown is the crown jewel of the entire class. The five-star recruit was the No. 1 player in Georgia, a state that Auburn considers a key part of its recruiting footprint.

Junior college transfer John Franklin III could be the answer to Auburn's troubles at quarterback, especially with the Tigers trying to return to a zone-read attack with a quick and athletic QB running the show.

"I know every year I've been here I've gotten up before you and said how excited I am, which I was, but this class is a little bit different," Malzahn said on Signing Day. "This class is a special class ... from the standpoint they are true impact players at impact positions."

The most impressive story out of Signing Day was how Auburn managed to keep the strong defensive signing class together despite the departure of defensive coordinator Will Muschamp and two of his assistants. Defensive line coach Rodney Garner got most of the credit as he kept the class together and even landed commitments on Signing Day from Brown and others.

"For us to stick together and put forth the united front, I think that was really good," Garner says. "I've always said, Auburn is a great, great product. And it's an easy product to sell."

In a heartbreaking twist, offensive tackle Brodarius Hamm and defensive lineman Tashawn Manning are battling cancer, but coaches and doctors are confident they'll pull through and be on campus — just like offensive tackle Shon Coleman in 2010 — in the future.

SPOTLIGHT ON

NATE CRAIG-MYERS

WR • DADE CITY, FL

Nate Craig-Myers was one of the top uncommitted players heading into Signing Day, and while his decision to pick Auburn over North Carolina wasn't necessarily a huge surprise, it did bolster an already strong group many believe will provide the Tigers the best receiving corps in the SEC in the near future.

Craig-Myers was also a nice parting gift from Auburn alum and receivers coach Dameyune Craig, who bolted for LSU less than two weeks after landing the nation's top remaining receiver. Despite developing a close relationship with Craig, Craig-Myers feels comfortable with his decision to come to Auburn, especially knowing he could play immediately.

"He's a humble guy. He's a quiet guy, and he's going to come in here hungry and ready to work," says Auburn receivers coach Kodi Burns. "Based off his film, we know what he can do; he's a really good player. There's little things we have to get cleaned up when he gets here because it's no longer high school. He's playing against different competition. I have to develop him into a great receiver."

The 6'2", 205-pounder originally committed to Auburn in July 2014 but decommitted last May. It wasn't until the final two months before Signing Day that the Tigers seemed poised to regain his commitment. Auburn's four incoming receivers are all top-rated prospects, but Craig-Myers should prove to be the best of the bunch.

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
Woody Barrett	QB	6-3/225	Winter Garden, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	216
John Broussard Jr.	CB	5-11/163	Phenix City, AL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	274
Derrick Brown	DT	6-4/315	Sugar Hill, GA	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	9
Marlon Character	S	6-0/175	Atlanta, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	348
Nick Coe	DE	6-6/269	Asheboro, NC	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	275
Nate Craig-Myers	WR	6-2/205	Dade City, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	43
Marlon Davidson	DE	6-3/281	Greenville, AL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	29
Kyle Davis	WR	6-2/208	Loganville, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	72
John Franklin III	ATH	6-1/174	Fort Lauderdale, FL	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	22*
Brodarious Hamm	OL	6-5/322	Griffin, GA	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	342
Antwuan Jackson Jr.	DT	6-2/308	Ellenwood, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	49
Paul James III	LB	6-4/258	Miami, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	17*
Tashawn Manning	DT	6-4/260	Apopka, FL	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	994
Marquis McClain	WR	6-2/209	Crestview, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	428
Malik Miller	RB	5-11/218	Huntsville, AL	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	447
Jayvaughn Myers	CB	6-1/185	Dade City, FL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	389
Landon Rice	TE	6-5/246	Rome, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	224
Prince Micheal Sammons	OL	6-8/280	Clarksville, OH	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	211
Eli Stove	WR	6-0/175	Niceville, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	121
Daniel Thomas	S	6-0/190	Montgomery, AL	★★★	NR	★★	★★★	1,502
Tré Threat	OLB	6-0/246	Geneva, AL	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	422

*junior college transfer

LSU TIGERS

National Forecast: **9** /// *SEC West Prediction:* **2**

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	3	vs. Wisconsin #
Sept.	10	Jacksonville State
Sept.	17	Mississippi State
Sept.	24	at Auburn
Oct.	1	Missouri
Oct.	8	at Florida
Oct.	15	Southern Miss
Oct.	22	Ole Miss
Nov.	5	Alabama
Nov.	12	at Arkansas
Nov.	19	South Alabama
Nov.	24	at Texas A&M

#Green Bay, WI

Les Miles stepped to the Tiger Stadium 20-yard-line and doffed his trademark white cap to the nearly 100,000 fans who presumed they were witnessing Miles' final game in Baton Rouge. The 11th-year coach proceeded with the Nov. 28 Senior Day festivities and coached his team to a 19–7 win against Texas A&M before his linemen carried him off the field on their shoulders. They stopped only to sing the alma mater while students showered him with praise and admiration.

Miles, of course, was hastily informed by school president F. King Alexander minutes later that he would indeed remain the coach, ending three weeks of rampant speculation about a coaching change and sealing arguably the most tumultuous period in Tigers football history. A season in which LSU began 7–0 and reached as high as No. 2 in the College Football Playoff rankings ended in bizarre fashion, a chapter in Miles' career only the quirky coach could pen.

Despite nearly losing his job, he signed a top-five recruiting class while absorbing Kevin Steele's abrupt departure in the hotel after the Texas Bowl, luring Dave Aranda to become his third defensive coordinator in as many seasons. He capped off his coaching staff with new running backs coach Jabbar Juluke — a native New Orleanian and hometown favorite — and new wide receivers coach Dameyune Craig from division rival Auburn to invigorate the program, priming the fan base for another season of championship expectations as 18 starters return from a 9–3 team.

TRE'DAVIOUS WHITE

QUARTERBACKS Brandon Harris returns with added competition from Purdue transfer Danny Etling, who spent the 2015 season manning the Tigers scout team while Harris and Anthony Jennings battled for playing time. Jennings transferred, leaving Harris — the only LSU quarterback who's taken SEC snaps — to battle Etling for the starting role. Harris took first-team reps throughout the spring and expressed optimism for his junior season given offensive coordinator Cam Cameron's planned move from the press box to the sidelines. Cameron coached from the sidelines in LSU's Texas Bowl victory, where it scored 56 points and Harris had 254 yards passing. (It should be noted, however, that those gaudy stats were produced against Texas Tech, one of the worst defensive teams in the nation in 2015.) Harris had sports hernia surgery just after the season but was a full participant in spring practice, where he said he and Etling bounced ideas off one another in the film room "to try to learn from what (Etling) learned in the Big Ten."

RUNNING BACKS Returning as a Heisman Trophy frontrunner after setting LSU's single-season rushing record, Leonard Fournette gets a new position coach — Juluke — and more experience around him in what will, in all likelihood, be his last season in Baton Rouge. He was a near-unanimous Heisman pick until Alabama stuffed him in Tuscaloosa, but Fournette hasn't let the season-ending disappointment discourage him. The rising junior has ascended to No. 4 on the program's career rushing yards and touchdown lists, but the development of sophomore Derrius Guice could give Fournette an opportunity to lighten his workload. Guice, who teammates joke

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 10-2, 6-2 SEC

The conclusion to the 2015 regular season will be remembered for one of the strangest moments in LSU history. All signs pointed to a coaching change, but Les Miles somehow survived for another season. Although Miles remained on the job, the question marks haven't changed. The Tigers have one of the nation's most talented rosters but are only 9–7 in SEC play over the last two seasons. Running back Leonard Fournette is the Heisman Trophy frontrunner, and the addition of new coordinator Dave Aranda should bolster a defense that returns 10 starters. However, LSU won't contend for the SEC title without improvement from junior quarterback Brandon Harris and the passing game.

Postseason: Cotton Bowl vs. Houston

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

THE QUARTERBACK WHISPERER? LSU plucked Dameyune Craig away from SEC West rival Auburn — Craig's alma mater — to replace Tony Ball as receivers coach. Craig was Jimbo Fisher's recruiting coordinator and quarterbacks coach at Florida State, where he gained the reputation as a "quarterback whisperer," before returning to Auburn. Les Miles indicated Craig would dabble in some quarterback coaching at LSU, where he's got a bit of experience. "I was always ready to play against LSU," Craig said at his introductory news conference. "I got excited." Craig played against LSU in all four years at Auburn, mustering a 2–2 record. He got the final laugh, though, when he commanded a 10-play, 80-yard, game-winning drive in Tiger Stadium during his senior season.

THIRD TIME AROUND Ace recruiter Frank Wilson's departure for UTSA's head coaching job left Miles with a simple solution — promote Ed Orgeron to recruiting coordinator. Orgeron, a two-time recruiting coordinator at USC, was pursued by Mississippi State for its defensive coordinator job but chose to stay at his "dream job."

NO. 18 RETURNS Tre'Davious White returns and will once again be donning LSU's revered No. 18 jersey, the first recipient of the program's highest honor to wear it in consecutive years since tight end Richard Dickson in 2008 and 2009. Former running back Jacob Hester wore the number, reserved for a player determined to embody LSU football on and off the field, for all four of his seasons until 2007. The coaching staff and past No. 18s then began voting on which player would wear the coveted jersey.

CAMERON GETS CLOSER? After watching his offense tally 638 yards from the sidelines in LSU's 56–27 win against Texas Tech in the Texas Bowl, Tigers offensive coordinator Cam Cameron might make a permanent move to the sidelines. It was the first time in Miles' LSU tenure that an offensive coordinator coached from the field. Cameron said after the bowl that he originally planned to move from the press box at the beginning of the season, but his prostate cancer diagnosis in the offseason gave him pause. "I think you'll see this upcoming season with him being on the sideline that our offense will soar and be what we want it to be just because of his voice and him being down there and able to communicate with the quarterbacks," Brandon Harris said in the spring. "It's paramount."

DIAMOND TO DEATH VALLEY LSU had a surprise addition to its spring roster when 25-year-old freshman Zach Von Rosenberg came back to school after a six-year minor league baseball career. Von Rosenberg committed and signed with LSU to play both baseball and football out of Zachary (La.) High School but instead opted for a professional baseball career, signing with the Pittsburgh Pirates after he was drafted in the sixth round of the 2009 MLB Draft. He pitched in 332.2 professional innings with a 4.52 ERA, though he never made it to the big leagues. Signed as a punter in 2009, Von Rosenberg is listed as a tight end.

"hates to touch the ground," totaled 436 yards last season, including a breakout game against Texas A&M in which he had a 50-yard touchdown scamper and two kickoff returns totalling 97 yards. Guice is a physical tackle-breaker who can spell Fournette and keep the Tigers offense churning.

RECEIVERS Handcuffed by inconsistent quarterback play and a run-first philosophy, LSU's receiving corps was gutted by the offseason departures of Trey Quinn and John Diarse — two highly sought-after in-state recruits who never developed in an inept passing game. The Tigers do return leading receiver Malachi Dupre, the only wideout to catch more than 30 passes, and Travin Dural, who returns for his senior season after a grisly torn hamstring ended his junior year prematurely. Tyron Johnson, who caught nine passes in his first collegiate season, also returns after some late-season action. Miles used last spring to effusively praise D.J. Chark, who in turn caught zero passes and was unheard of until a 79-yard end-around touchdown in the Texas Bowl. This spring, Miles turned that praise onto Jazz Ferguson and Derrick Dillon, one of whom will need to make an impact to lessen the burden on Dural and Dupre. Craig, the new position coach, came to Baton Rouge with the intent to instill his new group with physicality, and for the most part, he liked what manifested in spring practice from a unit that still needs consistent quarterback play to take a leap forward.

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (8)					
WR	15	**Malachi Dupre (Jr.)**	82	D.J. Chark (Jr.)
WR	83	**Travin Dural (Sr.)**	3	Tyron Johnson (So.)
LT	75	**Maea Teuhema (So.)**	63	K.J. Malone (Jr.)
LG	64	**Will Clapp (So.)**	78	Garrett Brumfield (So.)
C	77	**Ethan Pocic (Sr.)**	72	Andy Dodd (Jr.)
RG	76	Josh Boutte (Sr.)	78	Garrett Brumfield (So.)
RT	66	Toby Weathersby (Jr.)	70	George Brown Jr. (Fr.)
TE	81	**Colin Jeter (Sr.)**	84	Foster Moreau (So.)
QB	6	**Brandon Harris (Jr.)**	16	Danny Etling (Jr.)
RB	7	**Leonard Fournette (Jr.)**	5	Derrius Guice (So.)
FB	44	J.D. Moore (Jr.)	47	Bry'Kiethon Mouton (So.)
DEFENSE (10)					
DE	92	**Lewis Neal (Sr.)**	58	Sione Teuhema (Jr.)
NT	91	**Christian LaCouture (Sr.)**	99	Greg Gilmore (Jr.)
DT	57	**Davon Godchaux (Jr.)**	97	Frank Herron (Jr.)
DE	49	**Arden Key (So.)**	46	Tashawn Bower (Sr.)
LB	23	Corey Thompson (Sr.)	40	Duke Riley (Sr.)
LB	52	**Kendell Beckwith (Sr.)**	24	Devin White (Fr.)
LB	48	Donnie Alexander (Jr.)	35	Devin Voorhies (Jr.)
CB	21	Ed Paris (Jr.)	2	**Kevin Toliver (So.)**
CB	18	**Tre'Davious White (Sr.)**	13	**Dwayne Thomas (Sr.)**
S	33	**Jamal Adams (Jr.)**	26	John Battle (Jr.)
S	9	**Rickey Jefferson (Sr.)**	13	Dwayne Thomas (Sr.)
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	14	Trent Domingue (Sr.)	KR	5	Derrius Guice (So.)
P	14	Trent Domingue (Sr.)	PR	18	Tre'Davious White (Sr.)

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN Other than a battle at left tackle, LSU set its offensive line early in camp, absorbing the loss of Jerald Hawkins — the Tigers' only early entrant into the NFL Draft — and Vadal Alexander by shuffling the starters from last season's group that faltered down the stretch. Ethan Pocic, whom Miles has called the most versatile offensive linemen he's ever coached, likely goes to center, but that hinges on a left tackle battle between Maea Teuhema and K.J. Malone. Pocic missed all of spring practice after hip surgery. Will Clapp, who started all 12 games of his freshman season at right guard, has moved to left guard, and senior Josh Boutte now mans right guard. Pocic's the unquestioned leader of another inexperienced group, so offensive line coach Jeff Grimes likes him at center, but he didn't rule out the possibility of moving him around the line to utilize his versatility. Toby Weathersby, who came on toward the end of last season as the offensive line's "sixth man," now gets a shot at right tackle.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN Aranda ushers in a new era in defensive football, bringing a 3-4 alignment to Baton Rouge for the first time in Miles' tenure. Such a transition throws the Tigers' returning defensive linemen all over the field, most notably Arden Key, who had five sacks and 6.5 tackles for a loss in a breakout freshman season at defensive end. He and returning end Lewis Neal will now play a more stand-up, outside rushing role in Aranda's new scheme, although Aranda's flexible front won't allow them to abandon the traditional, hand-in-the-dirt position. Returning interior linemen Christian LaCouture and Greg Gilmore will stay inside, but Aranda's preached

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH
Les Miles

RECORD AT SCHOOL
112-32 (11 years)

CAREER RECORD
140-53 (15 years)

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Cam Cameron

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Dave Aranda

LOCATION
Baton Rouge, LA

STADIUM
Tiger Stadium (102,321)

KEY TIGERS

JAMAL ADAMS, S Perhaps the hardest hitter on the defense, Adams had a team-leading four interceptions and added five tackles for a loss in a 2015 season that netted him second-team All-SEC honors.

LEONARD FOURNETTE, RB A Heisman Trophy frontrunner after scoring 22 TDs and setting LSU's single-season rushing record.

KENDELL BECKWITH, LB The Bednarik and Butkus Award semifinalist gives veteran stability at LSU's thinnest defensive position.

MALACHI DUPRE, WR Dupre caught six of LSU's 13 touchdown passes last season, emerging as a legitimate deep threat for an inexperienced quarterback.

TRE'DAVIOUS WHITE, CB White was a Thorpe Award semifinalist and returned punts, including a 69-yard touchdown return against Syracuse.

KEY LOSSES

DEION JONES, LB A senior who had a breakout final season in Baton Rouge to buoy his draft stock, Jones led the team with 100 tackles and 13.5 tackles for a loss.

VADAL ALEXANDER, OL Alexander, a 46-game starter at left guard and right tackle in his four-year LSU career, garnered second-team All-America honors last season.

JERALD HAWKINS, OL The only early defector into the NFL Draft, Hawkins started 11 games and had 38 knockdown blocks.

JALEN MILLS, S Mills missed five games thanks to a preseason leg injury but returned to record 30 tackles.

ANTHONY JENNINGS, QB Jennings wasn't projected to usurp the starting role from Brandon Harris, but his transfer leaves the Tigers with only one quarterback — Harris — who has taken a snap.

RISING STAR

Signed as a running back, **Devin White** emerged during spring practice as one of Dave Aranda's most impressive linebackers, vaulting up the depth chart with a big, in-your-face style that suits the Tigers' new defensive coordinator perfectly.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 LSU ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
16 Etling, Danny	6-3/226	Jr.	Terre Haute, IN
6 Harris, Brandon	6-3/206	Jr.	Bossier City, LA
10 Jennings, Anthony	6-2/216	Sr.	Marietta, GA
2 LaForge, Trey	6-3/194	Fr.	New Orleans, LA
11 Landry, Spencer	6-0/195	So.	Berwick, LA
14 Lewis, Caleb	6-4/211	Fr.	Lakeland, FL
12 McMillan, Justin	6-2/193	Fr.	Cedar Hill, TX
17 Scheyd, Tiger	6-0/179	So.	Miramar Beach, FL

RUNNING BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
4 Brossette, Nick	6-0/218	So.	Baton Rouge, LA
41 Ducre, David	6-0/238	So.	Slidell, LA
27 Fournette, Lanard	5-10/187	Fr.	New Orleans, LA
7 Fournette, Leonard	6-1/230	Jr.	New Orleans, LA
33 Gallman, Trey	6-1/256	So.	Prairieville, LA
5 Guice, Derrius	5-11/222	So.	Baton Rouge, LA
34 Henry, Reshaud	5-8/191	Jr.	Ponchatoula, LA
48 Lamarque, Ronnie	6-1/212	Fr.	New Orleans, LA
44 Moore, J.D.	6-4/235	Jr.	Ruston, LA
47 Mouton, Bry'Kiethon	6-1/255	So.	Lafayette, LA
32 Upchurch, Tony	6-1/241	So.	Pearland, TX
28 Williams, Darrel	6-0/232	Jr.	Marrero, LA

RECEIVERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
11 Anderson, Dee	6-5/204	Fr.	DeSoto, TX
82 Chark, D.J.	6-3/186	Jr.	Alexandria, LA
19 Dillon, Derrick	5-11/178	Fr.	Franklinton, LA
15 Dupre, Malachi	6-3/190	Jr.	New Orleans, LA
83 Dural, Travin	6-2/203	Sr.	Breaux Bridge, LA
86 Ferguson, Jazz	6-5/215	So.	St. Francisville, LA
39 Gage, Russell	6-0/182	Jr.	Baton Rouge, LA
22 James, Miquel	5-9/165	Jr.	Kentwood, LA
3 Johnson, Tyron	6-1/189	So.	New Orleans, LA
31 Jones, Justin	5-8/175	Fr.	Dallas, TX
29 Landrum, Louis	5-10/198	Fr.	New Orleans, LA
30 Ostrom, Michael	6-0/180	Fr.	Baton Rouge, LA
87 Sullivan, Stephen	6-6/228	Fr.	Donaldsonville, LA

TIGHT ENDS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
81 Jeter, Colin	6-7/244	Sr.	Longview, TX
84 Moreau, Foster	6-5/261	So.	New Orleans, LA
89 Smith, DeSean	6-5/243	Sr.	Lake Charles, LA
45 Tharp, Josh	6-4/246	Jr.	Erin, TN
46 Von Rosenburg, Zach	6-5/228	Fr.	Lake Charles, LA
88 Washington, Jacory	6-6/228	So.	Westlake, LA

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
58 Abdul-Aziz, Jibrail	6-1/281	So.	Baton Rouge, LA
76 Boutte, Josh	6-5/342	Sr.	New Iberia, LA
70 Brown Jr., George	6-7/283	Fr.	Cincinnati, OH
78 Brumfield, Garrett	6-3/294	So.	Baton Rouge, LA
61 Cheramie, Alex	6-0/280	Jr.	Cypress, TX
64 Clapp, William	6-5/303	So.	New Orleans, LA
55 Cody, Roshon	5-10/249	So.	Baton Rouge, LA
72 Dodd, Andy	6-4/319	Jr.	Lindale, GA
54 Luke, Rory	6-4/284	Fr.	New Orleans, LA
73 Magee, Adrian	6-4/324	Fr.	Franklinton, LA
63 Malone, K.J.	6-4/298	Jr.	Ruston, LA
62 Mikush, Justin	6-4/348	So.	Tomball, TX
68 Okeke, Chidi	6-6/311	Fr.	Anambra, Nigeria
77 Pocic, Ethan	6-7/309	Sr.	Lemont, IL
69 Simmers, Turner	6-4/274	So.	Prairieville, LA
75 Teuhema, Maea	6-5/327	So.	Keller, TX
66 Weathersby, Toby	6-5/292	So.	Houston, TX

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
46 Bower, Tashawn	6-5/240	Sr.	Somerville, NJ
98 Clark, Deondre	6-4/253	Jr.	Oklahoma City, OK
99 Gilmore, Greg	6-4/313	Jr.	Hope Mills, NC
57 Godchaux, Davon	6-4/293	Jr.	Plaquemine, LA
59 Harper, Jordan	6-3/231	Sr.	New Orleans, LA
54 Haynes, Eman	6-2/216	Jr.	Covington, LA
97 Herron, Frank	6-4/289	Jr.	Memphis, TN
49 Key, Arden	6-6/231	So.	Atlanta, GA
91 LaCouture, Christian	6-5/307	Sr.	Lincoln, NE
92 Neal, Lewis	6-2/264	Sr.	Wilson, NC
93 Patterson, M.J.	6-3/223	Jr.	Winnfield, LA
60 Roberts, Marcus	5-11/282	Sr.	Baton Rouge, LA
58 Teuhema, Sione	6-4/251	Jr.	Keller, TX
94 Washington, Isaiah	6-4/241	So.	New Orleans, LA

LINEBACKERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
48 Alexander, Donnie	6-1/215	Jr.	New Orleans, LA
52 Beckwith, Kendell	6-2/252	Sr.	Clinton, LA
62 Burns, Hunter	6-0/222	Jr.	Wilmer, AL
45 Divinity Jr., Michael	6-3/224	Fr.	Marrero, LA
55 Miller, Cole	6-2/220	Jr.	Shreveport, LA
40 Riley, Duke	6-0/227	Sr.	Buras, LA
51 Rucker, Jonathan	6-0/236	Jr.	Ponchatoula, LA
35 Voorhies, Devin	6-1/216	Jr.	Woodville, MS
24 White, Devin	6-1/255	Fr.	Springhill, LA

DEFENSIVE BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
33 Adams, Jamal	6-1/211	Jr.	Carrollton, TX
26 Battle, John	6-1/194	Jr.	Hallandale, FL
14 Conde, Christian	5-9/188	Fr.	Shreveport, LA
12 Dickens, Micah	5-9/186	Jr.	Dry Prong, LA
21 Hammond, Deven	5-9/181	Fr.	Port Allen, LA
19 Itwaru, Narendra	5-9/159	Fr.	Poughkeepsie, NY
1 Jackson, Donte	5-11/167	So.	Metairie, LA
9 Jefferson, Rickey	6-0/206	Sr.	St. Rose, LA
32 Lavigne, Leyton	5-10/177	So.	Ponchatoula, LA
25 Lemoine, T.J.	5-10/180	Fr.	Monroe, LA
17 Lewis, Xavier	6-0/193	Fr.	LaPlace, LA
21 Paris, Ed	6-1/210	Jr.	Arlington, TX
8 Smith, Saivion	6-3/191	Fr.	St. Petersburg, FL
27 Surtain, Brandon	5-8/181	Sr.	Baton Rouge, LA
13 Thomas, Dwayne	6-0/186	Sr.	New Orleans, LA
23 Thompson, Corey	6-2/221	Sr.	Missouri City, TX
2 Toliver II, Kevin	6-2/196	So.	Jacksonville, FL
41 Wallace, Abraham	6-0/196	So.	Baton Rouge, LA
15 Westly, Tony	6-0/170	Jr.	St. Gabriel, LA
18 White, Tre'Davious	5-11/191	Sr.	Shreveport, LA
14 Williams, Lionel	6-0/201	Jr.	Chesterfield, VA

SPECIALISTS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
59 Ballis, John (LS)	6-1/215	Jr.	Houston, TX
42 Delahoussaye, Colby (K)	5-9/182	Sr.	New Iberia, LA
14 Domingue, Trent (K/P)	6-2/170	Sr.	Mandeville, LA
50 Ferguson, Blake (LS)	6-3/221	Fr.	Buford, GA
36 Gamble, Cameron (K)	5-10/197	Jr.	Flower Mound, TX
35 Gonsoulin, Jack (K)	5-9/165	Fr.	Baton Rouge, LA
38 Growden, Josh (P)	6-2/197	Fr.	Sydney, Australia

Scouting the TIGERS

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP LSU

"I think the biggest misconception about LSU is that their problems have all been about the quarterback. Don't get me wrong, that's been an issue, but I look at their defensive line too. You look at them the last few years and then you look at Alabama and it's like, wow, they don't even compare anymore. They haven't had the grown men up there like they used to have. Maybe that'll start to change now that Ed Orgeron is there. Getting some of that element back would be huge for them because that's the difference in beating Alabama like they were doing four, five years ago even when they were average at quarterback. ... They made a great hire in Dave Aranda. He was really tough to figure out at Wisconsin because he was so multiple and exotic in giving an offense different looks, and now he's got much better players to work with. If he can get them to buy into the discipline it takes to run that scheme, they could be really tough. ... They're certainly talented across the board, but they need to get Brandon Harris or somebody else to give them more consistent quarterback play. Like, we just begged them to throw it. We loaded the box on Leonard Fournette, and they really struggled. It's not like some big secret. If you don't have a quarterback in this league, good luck."

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: (9-3, 5-3)

Sept.	12	at Mississippi State	W	21-19
Sept.	19	Auburn	W	45-21
Sept.	26	at Syracuse	W	34-24
Oct.	3	Eastern Michigan	W	44-22
Oct.	10	South Carolina	W	45-24
Oct.	17	Florida	W	35-28
Oct.	24	Western Kentucky	W	45-20
Nov.	7	at Alabama	L	16-30
Nov.	14	Arkansas	L	14-31
Nov.	21	at Ole Miss	L	17-38
Nov.	28	Texas A&M	W	19-7
Dec.	29	vs. Texas Tech #	W	56-27

#Texas Bowl

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Brandon Harris	**277**	**149**	**2,165**	**13**	**6**

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Leonard Fournette	**300**	**1,953**	**6.2**	**22**
Derrius Guice	**51**	**436**	**8.5**	**3**
Darrel Williams	**60**	**296**	**4.9**	**4**
Brandon Harris	**67**	**226**	**3.**	**4**

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Malachi Dupre	**43**	**698**	**16.2**	**6**
Travin Dural	**28**	**533**	**19.0**	**3**
Leonard Fournette	**19**	**253**	**13.3**	**1**
John Diarse	13	137	10.5	0
Colin Jeter	**12**	**132**	**11.0**	**1**

KICKING: **Trent Domingue, 13-17 FGs, 49-50 XPs, 94 points**

TACKLES: Deion Jones, 100; **Kendell Beckwith, 84**

SACKS: **Lewis Neal, 8.0**

INTERCEPTIONS: **Jamal Adams, 4**

Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	32.8 ppg	6	44
Rushing	256.8 ypg	1	7
Passing	180.4 ypg	11	105
Total	437.3 ypg	4	39

DEFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	24.3 ppg	10	41
Rushing	122.9 ypg	3	17
Passing	224.3 ypg	12	65
Total	347.2 ypg	5	25

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
+7	+0.58	2	26

MALACHI DUPRE

a more aggressive, active plan for them to get up the field. Newcomer Edwin Alexander will join LaCouture and Gilmore on the interior.

LINEBACKERS Aranda works with the inside linebackers in this new scheme, a group led by Kendell Beckwith, the team's leading returning tackler. Beckwith, the only returning player with 10 or more tackles for a loss, headlines an otherwise thin position group that's seen the emergence of mid-year enrollee Devin White. White, who was a 5,000-yard career rusher in high school, worked primarily as a linebacker with the starting group throughout spring practice and impressed Aranda. Donnie Alexander, a seldom-used junior, also impressed in spring to earn a spot. Senior Duke Riley, who saw some time at middle linebacker last season, expects to play more outside in Aranda's scheme, alongside another mid-year enrollee, Michael Divinity. Riley didn't start a game last season but finished with 24 tackles and may be leaned upon to help fill a leadership void left by departed senior Deion Jones, last year's leading tackler.

DEFENSIVE BACKS The scheme may change, but LSU's loaded defensive backfield will not, headlined by an unquestioned team leader and the Tigers' most vicious hitter at safety. Tre'Davious White, who was chosen to wear the program's revered No. 18 last season as a junior, returns for a final season in Baton Rouge after leading the team with seven pass break-ups last season. Jamal Adams, a hard-hitting junior who had four interceptions last season and played his way into second-team All-SEC honors, returns at safety alongside Rickey Jefferson — another three-year letterman and rising senior in this veteran, deep position group that promises to anchor Aranda's new-look defense.

SPECIALISTS After taking the placekicking duties from incumbent starter Colby Delahoussaye, Trent Domingue connected on his first 10 kicks and finished the season 13-of-17 along with a memorable touchdown on a fake field goal against Florida. A Lou Groza Award semifinalist, Domingue returns, and he'll likely split kickoffs with Cameron Gamble, who seemed to find his touchback groove toward the end of last season after out-of-bounds kickoffs had plagued the Tigers. Reloading the Australian punter pipeline, the Tigers likely will turn to Domingue or Aussie redshirt freshman Josh Growden to replace the graduated Jamie Keehn, another Aussie who was LSU's starting punter for the last three seasons.

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	28.7	98
DEFENSE	30.0	69
MARGIN	-1.3	87
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	44.3%	35
DEFENSE	40.2%	57
MARGIN	+4.1%	40
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	6.7	17
DEFENSE	5.2	33
MARGIN	+1.5	14
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	5.1	15
DEFENSE	4.6	81
MARGIN	+0.5	40
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	3.8	22
ACTUAL	7	27
MARGIN	+3.2	45

NUMBERS TO KNOW

KEY: 1-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

59.2 Looking at how many solo tackles opponents are making on you is a good way of determining how much you are spreading defenses out — run between the tackles, and that's probably a gang tackle. Opponents made solo tackles only 59.2 percent of the time against LSU, which tied for the lowest rate in the country (with Marshall). That's a sign of both a power identity and how hard it is to bring down Leonard Fournette.

-1.3 Special teams abandoned LSU in 2015. Thanks to iffy kicks and a bad return game, the Tigers had a field position margin of minus-1.3, 87th in FBS and 11th in the SEC. On average, they began drives at the 28.7 (98th) while opponents started at the 30.0 (69th). Running uphill eventually caught up to the Tigers in November.

4.57 LSU's defense was pretty good at avoiding big plays, which set them up for success as long as they could stiffen when opponents sniffed the end zone. That was, however, an issue. The Tigers allowed 4.57 points per scoring opportunity (first downs inside the 40), 81st in the country and ahead of only Arkansas and South Carolina within the SEC.

18.4 The source of many of LSU's defensive problems was a lack of playmaking up front. The Tigers made run stops at or behind the line on only 18.4 percent of rushes, 89th in FBS. The secondary was strong but disadvantaged because of a lack of passing downs.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION

Defensive Linemen	6
Defensive Backs	5
Offensive Linemen	4
Wide Receivers	3
Linebackers	2
Athletes	1
Kickers	1
Quarterbacks	1
Tight Ends	1

BY STATE

Louisiana	18
Texas	3
Alabama	1
Arizona	1
Florida	1

Les Miles' near-firing in November parlayed itself into a torrid three-month recruiting race resulting in another consensus top-five class, pieced together primarily by securing the state of Louisiana, where seven of the class' top 10 recruits played high school football.

New defensive coordinator Dave Aranda was welcomed to campus with a brilliant bunch of incoming talent — a crop headlined by top line-of-scrimmage players and defensive backfield help. Defensive tackle Rashard Lawrence picked the Tigers over Ohio State, and Kristian Fulton stayed in-state, committing to LSU on National Signing Day to cement the class near the top of the country. Fulton, specifically, could see immediate playing time alongside Michael Divinity, who brings needed bulk to the LSU linebackers. Saivion Smith could join Fulton in the defensive backfield, though his athleticism could put him on some return teams too. LSU whiffed on Erick Fowler, who flipped to Texas on National Signing Day, leaving it lacking linebackers, but Divinity was a mid-year enrollee, and newcomer Devin White — who signed with the Tigers as a running back — is also working at linebacker to offset the loss.

Drake Davis and Stephen Sullivan, a pair of four-star recruits, are playmaking receivers who can jockey for playing time.

Late into the signing period, the class' obvious omission was at quarterback, a position Miles and staff have consistently struggled to recruit and develop. After longtime commit Feleipe Franks flipped to Florida, the Tigers sought a few uncommitted signal-callers before settling on local product Lindsey Scott Jr., a dual-threat quarterback who passed for 3,000 yards and rushed for nearly 2,000 more in his senior season, rounding out a class that is otherwise thin on offensive skill players.

SPOTLIGHT ON

LINDSEY SCOTT JR.

QB • ZACHARY, LA.

Without a quarterback in its 2016 recruiting class as Signing Day drew near, LSU turned down the road, inking Baton Rouge-area product Lindsey Scott, Jr. — a dual-threat Gatorade Player of the Year who had offers from Maryland and Harvard. A household name in Baton Rouge, Scott was wooed not by LSU's football prowess (well, that had something to do with it), but its engineering program. His official visit was marked by a meeting with the school's dean of software engineering, which he said was an impetus in his decision to stay close to home.

Scott is the prototypical dual-threat quarterback that Les Miles favors, but he likely won't see time this season as veterans Brandon Harris and Danny Etling battle it out. But just his signing was welcome in Baton Rouge, which has had just one local product — Marcus Randall — take snaps at quarterback since 2000. The significance wasn't lost on Harris, who made a surprise appearance at Scott's signing, posing for pictures and going out to a celebratory lunch with his new teammate. The two faced off once in high school, with Harris besting the younger Scott in a playoff game.

"Ever since," Scott told *The Advocate*, "he's been like a big brother."

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
Edwin Alexander	DT	6-2/333	Hammond, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	66
Willie Allen	OT	6-6/303	River Ridge, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	173
Dee Anderson	WR	6-5/194	DeSoto, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	185
Andre Anthony	DE	6-4/219	New Orleans, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	204
Donavaughn Campbell	OG	6-5/349	Ponchatoula, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	137
Connor Culp	K	5-10/195	Phoenix, AZ	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	1,611
Lloyd Cushenberry III	OG	6-4/310	Geismar, LA	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	1,940
Drake Davis	WR	6-3/212	Baton Rouge, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	123
Michael Divinity Jr.	OLB	6-3/224	Marrero, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	63
Kristian Fulton	CB	6-0/178	Metairie, LA	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	21
Rashard Lawrence	DT	6-3/310	Monroe, LA	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	23
Cameron Lewis	S	6-1/190	Monroe, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	293
Glen Logan	DT	6-4/284	Destrehan, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	160
Sci Martin	DE	6-4/230	New Orleans, LA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	545
Eric Monroe	S	6-0/185	Houston, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	55
Jamal Pettigrew	TE	6-6/218	New Orleans, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	244
Caleb Roddy	DE	6-5/259	Denham Springs, LA	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	398
Jakori Savage	OT	6-5/289	Bay Minette, AL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,073
Lindsey Scott Jr.	QB	5-11/205	Zachary, LA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,046
Saivion Smith	CB	6-3/191	St. Petersburg, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	47
Stephen Sullivan	WR	6-6/228	Donaldsonville, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	122
Rahssan Thornton	LB	6-2/211	Killeen, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	195
Devin White	ATH	6-1/255	Springhill, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	134
Andraez Williams	CB	6-2/165	Shreveport, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	227

*junior college transfer

MISSISSIPPI STATE BULLDOGS

National Forecast: **41** /// *SEC West Prediction:* **7**

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	South Alabama
Sept. 10	South Carolina
Sept. 17	at LSU
Sept. 24	vs. Massachusetts #
Oct. 8	Auburn
Oct. 15	at BYU
Oct. 22	at Kentucky
Oct. 29	Samford
Nov. 5	Texas A&M
Nov. 12	at Alabama
Nov. 19	Arkansas
Nov. 26	at Ole Miss

#Foxboro, MA

It was only two years ago that Mississippi State spent five weeks ranked No. 1 in the country, but so much has changed since 2014.

Change is natural, and it does not necessarily predict doom — the Bulldogs have done this before, and they rallied to create the roster that won 19 games during the last two years. But 2016 will tell us if there will be any drop-off, or if Mississippi State is now at a point where it can keep on humming in the SEC West.

RICHIE BROWN

QUARTERBACKS How do you go about replacing Dak Prescott? He owns every single-season and career record in school history and finished his senior season with 3,793 yards passing, 588 rushing yards and 39 total touchdowns. The good news is that Dan Mullen has never not figured out how to make his quarterback successful, whether it was Alex Smith, Tim Tebow, Prescott or someone far less touted than those three. So you can trust that whoever ends up taking the snaps for the Bulldogs this season will be put in the best possible position. But who will that be? The leader in the clubhouse is redshirt sophomore Nick Fitzgerald. He was Prescott's primary backup in 2015, and a splendid game against Troy (6-of-7 passing, 170 total yards, three touchdowns) suggested that Fitzgerald was ready for that responsibility. But classmate Elijah Staley has a ton of natural skills, though injuries have prevented him from fully displaying them. Senior Damian Williams started the 2013 Egg Bowl and redshirted last year in order to come back for 2016. And redshirt freshman Nick Tiano is a real threat — people around the program raved last fall about how he acclimated to Mississippi State. "The key thing for them is the consistency," Mullen says. "Understand that out here on the field you have to do it over and over and you can't make special plays and then terrible plays. You have to make consistent plays and then special plays." The decision won't be made until preseason camp, but expect Fitzgerald to start when MSU hosts South Alabama on Sept. 3.

RUNNING BACKS The impact of Prescott's departure will also be felt at running back — not only was he the team's leading rusher in two of the last three seasons, but the threat of him taking off also forced defenses to play read-option differently against the Bulldogs. Even if all the quarterback options can run, it will not be the same. That means more will be expected of a crowded Bulldogs backfield that returns every piece from 2015. Brandon Holloway led the group in carries (92) and yards (413), but his zero rushing touchdowns supports the argument that the 5'8", 165-pound senior is not suited to gaining the tough yards in the red zone. The best bet in that regard is Aeris Williams, a 6'1", 205-pound sophomore who was the team's No. 3 back (but best short-yardage option) last year. He averaged 5.2 yards on his 20 carries. Senior Ashton Shumpert can also be a thumping big back, and there are more names that could push for carries with a strong August. It seems unlikely that Mississippi State will settle on just one back, so finding the right mix may be the more realistic goal for 2016.

RECEIVERS De'Runnya Wilson was the Mississippi State receiver everyone was talking about during the 2015 offseason, but by the end of the year it became clear that Fred Ross was actually

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 6-6, 2-6 SEC

Dan Mullen has guided Mississippi State to six straight bowl games and elevated the profile of the program. However, replacing the best player in school history, quarterback Dak Prescott, is a huge challenge. The QBs vying for the starting job have completed a total of 51 career passes. With Prescott departing, the offense needs improved play from the line and ground attack. The question marks continue on defense. Six starters are back, but there's a new coordinator (former NFL linebacker Peter Sirmon has replaced Miami-bound Manny Diaz), and standout tackle Chris Jones left for the NFL. A bowl is within reach, but Mississippi State figures to take a step back in the win column.

Postseason: Liberty Bowl vs. West Virginia

5-YEAR WIN TREND

AP

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

MAKING HIS MARK In seven seasons at Mississippi State, Dan Mullen has accumulated 55 wins to rank third all-time among Bulldog coaches. His winning percentage of .611 ranks second all-time to Allyn McKeen for coaches with at least six years on the job.

NEW NAMES ON DEFENSE When all four defensive coaches left in the offseason (one to be a head coach, one for the NFL and two for comparable positions), Mullen had to get to work. He brought in former USC assistant/NFL linebacker Peter Sirmon, who will be making his play-calling debut, and then three assistants who should all be savvy recruiters: defensive line coach Brian Baker (NFL), safeties coach Maurice Linguist (Iowa State) and secondary coach/recruiting coordinator Terrell Buckley (Louisville).

OUT WITH THE OLD PHONE Believe it or not, until recently Baker was still using a phone that could not connect to the Internet (he insists it was not a flip phone, but one with a slide-out keyboard). He could make calls and text; that was all he needed. But weeks before he was hired by MSU, Baker dropped that phone into the river. With his new smartphone in hand, he's gotten busy learning how to Tweet and connect with recruits.

CALL IT IN One change fans will not notice on gameday in Sirmon's defense is how he'll communicate his calls. Because almost every SEC team at this point is running some variation of the hurry-up, defenses have to be ready to go as soon as the ball is placed. So instead of the old approach where the coaches would signal in a sentence of direction, a word will have to do. Presumably veteran players will be expected to read the offensive formation and make changes leading up to the ball snap.

TRAVELING MEN There are Power 5 schools that will not go on the road for a non-conference game at all in 2016, and many more will do so only one time. But how many will do it twice, and neither time to another school in that classification? Mississippi State will, going to UMass on Sept. 24 and three weeks later to BYU. How did this happen? Well, Tulane canceled late on Mississippi State, and the Bulldogs had to scramble to fill with UMass (at least the game will be played at the Patriots' stadium). Then the SEC added a rule forcing every school to play a Power 5/Notre Dame/BYU school each season, and the Bulldogs had to find a game in order to comply.

GRAB THE BALL The Mississippi State defense recorded 13 interceptions in 2015 — a respectable number that ranked fifth in the SEC — but the Bulldogs still managed to finish last in the league in turnovers gained. The reason? Incredibly, State recovered only one fumble in 13 games.

SMALL CLASS Mississippi State signed only 18 players in February, one of the smaller classes in the country. It was expected, the result of a small senior class leaving the program. The Bulldogs were strategic and went heavy on offensive and defensive linemen, a lot of whom will be expected to redshirt. The end result is that very few brand new faces will likely make an impact this fall.

WR **FRED ROSS**

the Bulldogs' No. 1 option. Ross had a huge breakout season as a junior, catching 88 passes (second in the SEC, one behind Alabama's Calvin Ridley, who played in two more games) for 1,007 yards (fourth) and five touchdowns. Wilson was still very good and chose to enter the NFL Draft after the season. But Ross is back, so at least the Bulldogs' new quarterback knows where he needs to look first. Ross goes across the middle as well as anyone in the league, and he has the kind of quickness to run away from the pack once he catches the ball. Gabe Myles and Malik Dear have had success before, but the Bulldogs' depth at the position took a hit in April when Fred Brown was dismissed from the university. Brown caught 27 passes for 412 yards and three touchdowns as a junior. He will be missed. Donald Gray will replace Wilson as the team's deep threat — Gray averaged 18.4 yards on his 21 receptions last year (though 140 of his 386 yards came against FCS foe Northwestern State). Sophomore Justin Johnson will start at tight end, replacing Darrion Hutcherson and Gus Walley. Johnson caught only five passes in 2015.

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)					
WR	6	Donald Gray (Jr.)	35	Gabe Myles (Jr.)	
WR	86	Jesse Jackson (So.)	85	Jonnas Spivey (Fr.)	
WR	8	**Fred Ross (Sr.)**	22	Malik Dear (So.)	
LT	58	**Justin Senior (Sr.)**	64	Jocquell Johnson (Sr.)	
LG	61	Deion Calhoun (So.)	67	Michael Story (Fr.)	
C	60	**Jamaal Clayborn (Sr.)**	75	Harrison Moon (Fr.)	
RG	62	**Devon Desper (Sr.)**	69	Darryl Williams (Fr.)	
RT	55	Martinas Rankin (Jr.)	74	Elgton Jenkins (So.)	
TE	81	Justin Johnson (So.)		Jordan Thomas (Jr.)	
QB	7	Nick Fitzgerald (So.)	2	Elijah Staley (So.)	
RB	10	**Brandon Holloway (Sr.)**	27	Aeris Williams (So.)	
DEFENSE (6)					
DE	49	Torrey Dale (Sr.)		Jeffery Simmons (Fr.)	
NT	88	**Nick James (Sr.)**	94	Nelson Adams (Sr.)	
DE	47	**A.J. Jefferson (Sr.)**	97	Johnathan Calvin (Sr.)	
OLB	57	Will Coleman (Sr.)	3	Traver Jung (Jr.)	
ILB	44	Leo Lewis (Fr.)	50	Tim Washington (Fr.)	
ILB	39	**Richie Brown (Sr.)**	4	Gerri Green (So.)	
OLB	45	J.T. Gray (Jr.)	28	DeAndre Ward (Sr.)	
CB	5	Cedric Jiles (Sr.)	25	Lashard Durr (Jr.)	
CB	7	**Tolando Cleveland (Sr.)**	24	Chris Rayford (So.)	
S	41	Mark McLaurin (So.)	11	**Kivon Coman (Sr.)**	
S	1	**Brandon Bryant (So.)**	12	Jamal Peters (So.)	
SPECIAL TEAMS					
K	35	Westin Graves (Jr.)	KR	10 Brandon Holloway (Sr.)	
P	43	Logan Cooke (Jr.)	PR	8 Fred Ross (Sr.)	

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN No unit was more maligned in 2015 than the Bulldogs' offensive line, and for good reason: They gave up 32 sacks, including nine in a 31–6 loss to Alabama. Three starters are back, including Justin Senior, who also started in 2014 and will move from right to left tackle. Sophomore Deion Calhoun has every opportunity to win the left guard spot, and former top-rated junior college recruit Martinas Rankin has the same deal at right tackle. Jamaal Clayborn and Devon Desper are back for their second year together at center and right guard, respectively. There's not a sure-fire NFL prospect on the line, which is fine. But the group as a whole has to be much more solid and hold up against the terrific defensive lines it sees almost every week in the SEC. It would help if this group regained some of the nasty streak that was previously a hallmark of Bulldog lines.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN New coordinator Peter Sirmon's move to a predominant 3-4 defense changes the complexion along the defensive line for the Bulldogs, but it may work out for the best after the team lost tackle Chris Jones to the NFL Draft. Nick James is a massive human (6'5", 325) who began to tap his potential last year; now as a two-gap nose tackle, James will be trouble for opposing offensive linemen. End A.J. Jefferson is a terrific player (13.5 TFLs, five sacks) who is as likely to run by you as he is run over you. "He's one of our hardest-working guys," defensive line coach Brian Baker says of Jefferson. "He asks great questions. … It's like I told him, it's his turn now. He's the guy. I couldn't be more excited about A.J." Five-star end Jeffery Simmons was recruited to be the next great MSU lineman, and that could start immediately (provided he is on the field after legal trouble in the spring). Some of the other names are new faces or ones formerly in a reserve role, but Mississippi State has rarely not had a good defensive line. That does not figure to change anytime soon.

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH
Dan Mullen

RECORD AT SCHOOL
55-35 (7 years)

CAREER RECORD
55-35 (7 years)

CO-OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS
Billy Gonzales, John Hevesy

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Peter Sirmon

LOCATION
Starkville, MS

STADIUM
Davis Wade Stadium at Scott Field (61,337)

KEY BULLDOGS

A.J. JEFFERSON, DE The Bulldogs' top pass rusher, Jefferson is primed to build on a season that included 13.5 tackles for a loss and five sacks.

FRED ROSS, WR Emerged as one of the top receivers in the SEC last season, catching 88 passes for 1,007 yards and five touchdowns.

NICK JAMES, DT The stats do not tell the whole story, because the 325-pound James is often asked to eat up blockers and let teammates roam free.

RICHIE BROWN, LB In his first season as a starter, emerged as a reliable and prolific tackler. Will be counted on to lead the entire defense in 2016.

BRANDON BRYANT, S Freaky athleticism, a nose for the ball (three interceptions) and a willingness to hit (63 tackles) make Bryant a future All-SEC candidate.

KEY LOSSES

DAK PRESCOTT, QB The best player in program history, Prescott owns every QB record the school has and essentially willed his team to several wins.

DE'RUNNYA WILSON, WR A big-play threat, Wilson had more than 900 yards receiving, and his 10 TDs were double anyone else's.

CHRIS JONES, DT Finally began to deliver on his five-star promise as a junior (7.5 tackles for a loss, 2.5 sacks), only to bolt for the NFL.

BENIQUEZ BROWN, LB The team's No. 2 tackler (99 total, 11 for a loss), Brown surprised many by entering the NFL Draft. Also blocked two kicks.

TAVEZE CALHOUN, CB Physical, aggressive cornerback who got the most out of his skills. Had two interceptions and 10 passes defended as a senior.

RISING STAR

Good things happen when **Malik Dear** touches the ball. He did that in a variety of ways in 2015 as a slot receiver/running back who was also a factor on special teams. His overall number of touches was lower because of depth at his position, but Dear could be ready for a significant uptick in production.

Wesley Hitt

2016 MISSISSIPPI STATE ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
7 Fitzgerald, Nick	6-5/227	So.	Richmond Hill, GA
10 Gieb, Nate	6-2/175	So.	Flowood, MS
2 Staley, Elijah	6-6/248	So.	Marietta, GA
14 Tiano, Nick	6-4/231	Fr.	Chattanooga, TN
11 Williams, Damian	6-1/228	Sr.	Metairie, LA

RUNNING BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
37 Braswell III, Bennie	5-9/170	Jr.	Olive Branch, MS
21 Gibson, Nick	5-11/195	Fr.	Birmingham, AL
10 Holloway, Brandon	5-8/165	Sr.	Tampa, FL
33 Lee, Dontavian	6-1/227	So.	Hattiesburg, MS
26 Murphy, Alec	6-0/225	Fr.	Nixa, MO
32 Shumpert, Ashton	6-2/218	Sr.	Fulton, MS
27 Williams, Aeris	6-1/205	So.	West Point, MS

RECEIVERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
5 Brown, Fred	6-1/196	Sr.	Jackson, MS
22 Dear, Malik	5-9/220	So.	Jackson, MS
6 Gray, Donald	5-10/193	Jr.	Memphis, TN
86 Jackson, Jesse	6-2/210	So.	Petal, MS
23 Mixon, Keith	5-8/175	Fr.	Birmingham, AL
35 Myles, Gabe	6-0/192	Jr.	Starkville, MS
87 Powell, Wyatt	5-9/193	Fr.	Ridgeland, MS
8 Ross, Fred	6-2/207	Sr.	Tyler, TX
85 Spivey, Jonnas	6-0/182	Fr.	Bay Springs, MS
82 Teel, Jefferson	6-5/200	Jr.	Bartlett, TN
18 Thomas, Deddrick	5-9/184	Fr.	Memphis, TN

TIGHT ENDS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
54 Brown, Lawrence	6-4/292	Sr.	Columbus, MS
82 Green, Farrod	6-3/215	Fr.	Wesson, MS
88 Hamaker, Aaron	6-4/253	So.	Little Rock, AR
81 Johnson, Justin	6-3/229	So.	Birmingham, AL
84 Jones, Dontea	6-4/250	Fr.	McCool, MS
80 Roberson, Christian	6-5/230	Fr.	Powder Springs, GA

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
61 Calhoun, Deion	6-3/303	So.	Pleasant Grove, AL
60 Clayborn, Jamaal	6-4/315	Sr.	Jackson, MS
72 Cochran, Ronald	6-4/308	So.	Olive Branch, MS
62 Desper, Devon	6-4/305	Sr.	Madison, MS
74 Jenkins, Elgton	6-4/304	So.	Clarksdale, MS
64 Johnson, Jocquell	6-4/300	Sr.	Jackson, MS
73 Lacy, Rodney	5-11/290	Sr.	Birmingham, AL
75 Moon, Harrison	6-4/281	Fr.	Chattanooga, TN
55 Rankin, Martinas	6-5/302	Jr.	Mendenhall, MS
58 Senior, Justin	6-5/295	Sr.	Montreal, QC
67 Story, Michael	6-4/305	Fr.	Ripley, MS
79 Wilkerson, Evans	6-5/285	Fr.	Jackson, MS
69 Williams, Darryl	6-2/305	Fr.	Bessemer, AL

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
43 Adams, Fletcher	6-2/267	Fr.	Brandon, MS
94 Adams, Nelson	6-3/310	Sr.	Brandon, MS
65 Armour, Brett	6-1/262	Fr.	Brighton, TN
96 Brown, Tre	6-4/290	Jr.	Ackerman, MS
97 Calvin, Johnathan	6-3/263	Sr.	Jackson, MS
49 Dale, Torrey	6-6/270	Sr.	Kenner, LA
90 Harris, Grant	6-3/273	So.	Bolton, MS
95 Hoyett, Braxton	6-3/300	So.	Pelham, AL
88 James, Nick	6-5/325	Sr.	Long Beach, MS
47 Jefferson, A.J.	6-3/277	Sr.	Summit, MS
92 Jones, Kendell	6-4/265	Fr.	Pinson, AL
91 Mullins, Anfernee	6-3/259	Fr.	Aliceville, AL
34 Thomas, Cory	6-5/301	So.	Bessemer, AL

LINEBACKERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
39 Brown, Richie	6-2/245	Sr.	Long Beach, MS
51 Chairs, Kelan	6-0/220	Jr.	Harvey, LA
57 Coleman, Will	6-5/250	Sr.	Tyler, TX
45 Gray, J.T.	6-0/196	Jr.	Clarksdale, MS
4 Green, Gerri	6-4/243	So.	Greenville, MS
68 Hadley, Devin	6-3/240	Fr.	Tupelo, MS
46 Harris, Dez	6-4/239	Jr.	McCalla, AL
3 Jung, Traver	6-3/225	Jr.	Greenville, MS
44 Lewis, Leo	6-2/240	Fr.	Brookhaven, MS
56 Perkins, Allen	6-0/230	Fr.	Pelham, AL
38 Phillips, Josiah	6-4/236	So.	Starkville, MS
28 Ward, DeAndre	6-1/217	Sr.	Wetumpka, AL
50 Washington, Tim	6-2/198	Fr.	Yazoo City, MS

DEFENSIVE BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
1 Bryant, Brandon	5-11/205	So.	Tunica, MS
7 Cleveland, Tolando	6-0/190	Sr.	Powder Springs, GA
11 Coman, Kivon	6-3/196	Sr.	Sheffield, AL
26 Davis, Brandon	5-9/170	Sr.	Memphis, TN
25 Durr, Lashard	5-11/190	Jr.	Gulfport, MS
17 Evans, Deontay	5-10/204	Sr.	McComb, MS
9 Graham, Jamoral	5-10/173	Jr.	Decatur, MS
5 Jiles, Cedric	5-10/182	Sr.	Clinton, MS
41 McLaurin, Mark	6-2/210	So.	Collins, MS
37 McWilliams, Danortis	5-11/160	Fr.	New Albany, MS
29 Morgan, C.J.	6-0/192	Fr.	Bossier City, LA
30 Neary, Zak	6-1/192	So.	Adamsville, TN
12 Peters, Jamal	6-2/206	So.	Bassfield, MS
24 Rayford, Chris	6-0/194	So.	Byhalia, MS
31 Smitherman, Maurice	5-9/178	Fr.	Adamsville, AL
30 Stamps, Chris	6-0/175	Fr.	Vicksburg, MS
25 Walker, Hayes	5-11/195	So.	Jackson, MS
34 Worsham, Alan	5-10/190	Fr.	Martinez, GA

SPECIALISTS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
66 Baldwin, Joel (LS)	6-3/220	So.	Tupelo, MS
53 Bradley, Hunter (LS)	6-3/235	Sr.	Collierville, TN
37 Brown, Bryce (K)	6-2/180	So.	Katy, TX
43 Cooke, Logan (P/K)	6-5/216	Jr.	Darbun, MS
35 Graves, Westin (K)	6-0/163	Jr.	Flowood, MS
59 Swanson, Nathan (LS)	6-5/210	Fr.	Norcross, GA

Scouting the BULLDOGS

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP MISSISSIPPI STATE

"Obviously they have to replace one of the best quarterbacks in the league and a guy who was really perfect for that system, so it'll be interesting to see if they can keep their momentum going. The really tall, really young kid [Nick Fitzgerald] played a little bit last year and there was another guy [Elijah Staley] behind him they're high on, but it's hard to know what to expect. From everything we know, it's going to be an open competition. ... Schematically, though, they're one of the teams that you really admire. They have some good stuff in the playbook. Dan Mullen, some of the stuff he does on offense is just really well-respected from the standpoint of figuring out what defense you're going to be in and figuring out how they can beat you. They do some stuff to attack you and put your weak link in conflict on the edge. ... The really big wideout (De'Runnya Wilson) wasn't a natural pass catcher, but he was a big, strong body who made a lot of plays, so between him and Dak Prescott that's a lot of offensive skill they have to replace. ... They do bring back the rest of their receiving corps and a lot of their offensive line. They did some things offensively that helped mask their lack of physicality up front, but how much of that was Dak? That group has to get a lot better. ... Defensively, they've probably done as good a job as anyone of developing depth up front. They always seem to have five or six guys who can really rush the passer. Third straight year with a new coordinator isn't the ideal situation."

2015 RESULTS

RECORD: 9-4, 4-4 (SEC)

Sept. 5	at Southern Miss	W	34-16
Sept. 12	LSU	L	19-21
Sept. 19	Northwestern State	W	62-13
Sept. 26	at Auburn	W	17-9
Oct. 3	at Texas A&M	L	17-30
Oct. 10	Troy	W	45-17
Oct. 17	Louisiana Tech	W	45-20
Oct. 24	Kentucky	W	42-16
Nov. 5	at Missouri	W	31-13
Nov. 14	Alabama	L	6-31
Nov. 21	at Arkansas	W	51-50
Nov. 28	Ole Miss	L	27-38
Dec. 30	vs. NC State #	W	51-28

#Belk Bowl

KIVON COMAN

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Dak Prescott	477	316	3,793	29	5
Nick Fitzgerald	**14**	**11**	**235**	**3**	**0**

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Dak Prescott	160	588	3.7	10
Brandon Holloway	**92**	**413**	**4.5**	**0**
Ashton Shumpert	**59**	**228**	**3.9**	**1**
Aeris Williams	**40**	**206**	**5.2**	**3**

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Fred Ross	**88**	**1,007**	**11.4**	**5**
De'Runnya Wilson	60	918	15.3	10
Brandon Holloway	**33**	**396**	**12.0**	**5**
Fred Brown	27	412	15.3	3

KICKING: **Westin Graves, 15-18 FGs, 52-54 XPs, 97 points**

TACKLES: **Richie Brown, 109**; Beniquez Brown, 99

SACKS: **Richie Brown, 6.5**

INTERCEPTIONS: **Brandon Bryant, 3**

Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	34.4 ppg	5	33
Rushing	144.1 ypg	12	101
Passing	316.4 ypg	2	14
Total	460.5 ypg	3	31

DEFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	23.2 ppg	9	36
Rushing	174.6 ypg	10	70
Passing	216.5 ypg	10	57
Total	391.2 ypg	10	56

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
-4	-0.31	12	92

BRANDON BRYANT

LINEBACKERS Mississippi State got lucky when Richie Brown decided to return for his senior season. The middle linebacker led the Bulldogs in tackles (109, 13 of them for a loss) and sacks (6.5) last season, and he gives Sirmon someone in the middle of the defense he can trust to get everyone else in position. He also fits Sirmon's profile of a good teammate. "I'd definitely hang out with Richie Brown if I was going to school with him," Sirmon told the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*. "We'd be buddies." Alongside Brown will be Leo Lewis, a redshirt freshman and former four-star prospect, and J.T. Gray, who can run all day and stick with opposing tight ends. It'll be interesting to see what Sirmon ends up doing at the Viper position, which has been described as a hybrid position in his defense. Will Coleman, a former end, was the starter there for most of the spring and was often seen in a two-point stance; teammates say it fits Coleman, who often is in the lead pack during sprints.

DEFENSIVE BACKS The Bulldogs got a head start on their future in 2015 because of injuries, and that can only help them this fall. The team is fine at cornerback, with Cedric Jiles and Tolando Cleveland. But the unit has a chance to be special because of who is on the back end — particularly sophomore safety Brandon Bryant, who Mississippi State claims can run a sub-4.3 40-yard dash. Bryant had a team-leading three interceptions along with 63 tackles during his first college season. "To see him produce while he's taking on a (leadership) role is going to benefit him and benefit us a lot," Sirmon says. Kivon Coman and Mark McLaurin are battling it out at the other safety position, and Jamal Peters could also figure into things.

SPECIALISTS Logan Cooke and Westin Graves are back as the team's punter and placekicker, respectively. Cooke punted 44 times for a 42.2 average in 2015, and his leg got stronger as the year went on. Graves emerged from what had been a position of weakness and was solid last year; he was 15-of-18, and one of his misses was from 52 yards. Mississippi State did not push him too much in 2015, but the Bulldogs may rely on him more heavily this fall. Holloway gives the team a dynamite kick returner who could take one to the house at any moment. He averaged 23.6 yards per return last season and scored on a 100-yard run back in the opener against Southern Miss. Ross, one of the team's better athletes, will likely return punts.

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	29.6	74
DEFENSE	28.3	39
MARGIN	+1.3	53
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	46.2%	20
DEFENSE	42.6%	77
MARGIN	+3.6%	45
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	6.5	22
DEFENSE	5.3	44
MARGIN	+1.2	23
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	5.2	11
DEFENSE	4.2	45
MARGIN	+1.0	12
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	-6.5	111
ACTUAL	-4	92
MARGIN	+2.5	50

NUMBERS TO KNOW

KEY: **1**-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

46.2 Mississippi State's 46.2 percent offensive success rate ranked 20th in FBS and third in the SEC. While the running game wasn't fantastic (4.4 yards per carry, 66th in the country), Dak Prescott was a maestro. He completed 67 percent of his passes on first down to keep the Bulldogs ahead of the chains, then completed 70 percent on second downs.

42.6 Unfortunately, MSU's defense gave back some of the offensive gains. The Bulldogs allowed a success rate of 42.6 percent, 77th in FBS and 10th in the league. They were aggressive enough to rank 33rd in havoc rate (tackles for a loss, forced fumbles and passes defensed divided by total plays), but they were a little bit leakier than expected.

290.3 You can't say that Nick Fitzgerald didn't take advantage of his opportunities. Filling in for Prescott mostly in garbage time, Fitzgerald completed 11-of-14 passes for 235 yards and three touchdowns (passer rating: 290.3) while rushing for 127 yards. Filling Prescott's shoes is a monumental task, but Fitzgerald showed upside.

30.6 Of the 36 fumbles that took place in Mississippi State games in 2015, the Bulldogs recovered 11 of them. That 30.6 percent fumble recovery rate was the second-lowest in the country. Over time, every team's recovery rate gravitates toward 50 percent, so this is typically a sign of bad luck. With a normal number of fumble recoveries, MSU's turnover margin would have gone from minus-4 to plus-3.

Wesley Hitt

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION

Defensive Backs	4
Defensive Linemen	4
Offensive Linemen	3
Tight Ends	3
Wide Receivers	2
Athletes	1
Linebackers	1

BY STATE

Mississippi	10
Alabama	2
Florida	2
Louisiana	2
Georgia	1
Indiana	1

If you were expecting Mississippi State to sign a big, flashy recruiting class that would earn national headlines on Signing Day, you have not been paying attention. That's not what the Bulldogs do, for a variety of reasons. They've been very Mississippi-centric under Dan Mullen, and that did not change in the class of 2016. They're comfortable trusting their evaluations and a proven track record of development (under-recruited gems such as Benardrick McKinney, Johnthan Banks and Dak Prescott are evidence) to sign a bunch of three stars (15 of the 18 signees were ranked by the 247Sports Composite that way) and turn them into a team that can compete in the SEC.

That's not to say Mississippi State ignores all stars — it just prefers those close to home. In this class, that meant four-star defensive tackle Kobe Jones from hometown Starkville as well as five-star end Jeffery Simmons from Noxubee County. Simmons announced last on National Signing Day, and it could not have come at a better time for the Bulldogs (who had missed out on several other prospects making last-minute decisions).

Three-star wide receiver Jamal Couch is 6'5", and he will instantly be the biggest target the Bulldogs have. They also signed three high school offensive linemen, which is always a good thing, and a handful of tight ends to help with depth at that position (which was thin after graduation and other unexpected losses).

The class was far from perfect — Mississippi State did not sign a quarterback or running back, and Jones' teammate A.J. Brown was among those who got away (to Ole Miss, rubbing salt in the wound). It hurt the team to lose recruiting coordinator Tony Hughes in December, among other key recruiters. The Bulldogs will have to do better in 2017, but Simmons' signature made things just a little bit better on that afternoon in February.

SPOTLIGHT ON

KOBE JONES

DT • STARKVILLE, MISS.

Upside is a term that gets thrown around a lot during recruiting, but it may fit in the case of defensive tackle Kobe Jones.

Jones recorded 33 tackles (21 solo), nine tackles for a loss, five pass deflections, a forced fumble and a fumble recovery as a senior at Starkville High School, but he was also playing both ways for the state champion Yellow Jackets. Given time to focus on just one position in college, Jones could mature quickly.

"I know that he's made everyone proud," coach Dan Mullen said after Jones picked MSU over Miami, Ole Miss and Alabama. "He has what our program is all about, the character, effort. He always does things the right way at the right time. Every time we had him at camp, he's always going to be one of the hardest-working guys, if not the hardest-working guy out there every single day in every single drill. We are looking for work ethic and we are looking for high character, and he fits that for us."

Jones says that giving up Miami and the beach was hard, but in the end it sounds like it was a business decision.

"As you look at the statistics, I can't afford not to go to Mississippi State," Jones says. "(Former Bulldog) Fletcher Cox (could) sign the highest contract in the history of D-linemen."

Mullen likes to redshirt freshmen, particularly those along the lines, and the Bulldogs have decent depth there. But Jones has been a regular presence at MSU's facility since National Signing Day, and the depth chart is not so solid as to prevent a freshman from earning his way onto the field this fall.

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
Tre Brown	DT	6-4/290	Ackerman, MS	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	81*
Korey Charles	ATH	5-11/173	Tallahassee, FL	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	505
Jamal Couch	WR	6-5/222	Phenix City, AL	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	356
Cameron Dantzler	DB	6-2/170	Hammond, LA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,165
Lashard Durr	CB	5-11/190	Gulfport, MS	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	58*
Greg Eiland	OT	6-7/320	Philadelphia, MS	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	769
John Michael Hankerson	WR	6-1/170	South Bend, IN	★★★	NR	★★★	★★★	1,605
Dontea Jones	TE	6-4/250	McCool, MS	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	2*
Kobe Jones	DT	6-4/262	Starkville, MS	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	277
C.J. Morgan-Walker	CB	6-0/192	Bossier City, LA	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	466
Nero Nelson	DB	5-11/170	Hollandale, MS	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	468
Dareuan Parker	OT	6-5/326	Olive Branch, MS	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,466
Stewart Reese	OG	6-5/340	Fort Pierce, FL	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	405
Christian Roberson	TE	6-5/230	Powder Springs, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	704
Jeffery Simmons	DE	6-4/275	Macon, MS	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	19
Marquiss Spencer	DE	6-4/223	Greenwood, MS	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	266
Jordan Thomas	TE	6-6/275	Decatur, MS	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	59*
Erroll Thompson	ILB	6-2/245	Florence, AL	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	415

*junior college transfer

OLE MISS REBELS

National Forecast: **10** /// *SEC West Prediction:* **3**

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	vs. Florida State #
Sept. 10	Wofford
Sept. 17	Alabama
Sept. 24	Georgia
Oct. 1	Memphis
Oct. 15	at Arkansas
Oct. 22	at LSU
Oct. 29	Auburn
Nov. 5	Georgia Southern
Nov. 12	at Texas A&M
Nov. 19	at Vanderbilt
Nov. 26	Mississippi State

#Orlando, FL

Breaking up doesn't really have to be hard, even when it comes to a school's breakthrough recruiting class.

The 2013 signing class for Ole Miss coach Hugh Freeze announced the Rebels as a national power in the recruiting game. It was ranked No. 8 in the 247Sports Composite and helped Freeze and the Rebels to back-to-back New Year's Six Bowls. Ole Miss is 19–7 and 11–5 in SEC play over the last two seasons. The Rebels buried the memory of a disappointing Peach Bowl loss to TCU in 2014 with a crushing 48–20 win over Oklahoma State in the Sugar Bowl last season.

Offensive tackle Laremy Tunsil, defensive lineman Robert Nkemdiche and wide receiver Laquon Treadwell were the headliners. They were expected to leave after three seasons, and that's exactly what happened.

Freeze, though, has his program prepared for this moment. He continued to recruit well, singing top-20 classes in both 2014 and '15 and a top-10 class this past February. His recent recruiting hauls have stocked the program with unprecedented depth, and some of the incoming players will be expected to play key roles if the Rebels are to compete for an SEC championship this fall.

For all the success Ole Miss has achieved under Freeze, the Rebels remain the only program in the SEC West — other than newcomer Texas A&M — that has not played in the league title game. This team has the talent to make that — and possibly a trip to the College Football Playoff — a realistic goal, but there are potential land mines. One could be an active NCAA investigation, though the school is hopeful that its process and its cooperation with the NCAA along the way will carry weight. In the spring, Ole Miss filed its response to the NCAA's notice of allegations. The NCAA response is expected in the fall. Another obstacle is the schedule. The Rebels open the season with a daunting non-conference game against Florida State in Orlando and have road games in league play against Arkansas, LSU and Texas A&M and home dates with Alabama and Georgia.

MARQUIS HAYNES

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 9-3, 6-2 SEC

Hugh Freeze has raised expectations at Ole Miss, which has won 19 games the past two seasons — the best two-year stretch at the school since 1959-60. However, Ole Miss could take a small step back this season. Three key starters departed for the NFL Draft, and the Rebels feature the fewest returning starters (10) of any team in the SEC West. The return of the league's top quarterback (Chad Kelly), a solid set of skill players and experience on defense should help alleviate some of the personnel losses. Ole Miss won't fall far, but with a tough SEC road slate and a non-conference opener against Florida State, exceeding last year's record is unlikely.

Postseason: Citrus Bowl vs. Michigan State

QUARTERBACKS Chad Kelly is the top returning quarterback in the SEC after passing for 4,042 yards with 31 touchdowns and 13 interceptions in his first season in Oxford. He's also a running threat — he rushed for 509 yards and 10 touchdowns last year — so it's not hard to see why Kelly is the uncontested starter. He underwent surgery to repair a sports hernia in the spring but is expected to be fully recovered in time for preseason practice. While there's no game experience behind him, there is exciting potential. True freshman Shea Patterson, a five-star signee rated No. 1 at the position in the 2016 class by 247Sports, will be the backup. Freeze has talked about the possibility of redshirting Patterson, but it's unlikely he'll be able to make that decision on the front end after veterans Ryan Buchanan and DeVante Kincade left the program in the winter. Patterson enrolled early and ran with the second team much of the spring. Redshirt freshman Jason Pellerin is the third and final scholarship quarterback. He's tall and athletic and could possibly help at another position, but a move is doubtful given the numbers at quarterback.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

BACK FOR MORE Ole Miss had three players declare early for the draft following the 2015 season. The wave of departures could have been worse. Tight end Evan Engram and defensive end Fadol Brown both sought draft grades to get an idea of where they might land as juniors. Quarterback Chad Kelly was also a possible early entry candidate.

UNDER THE KNIFE Five players are coming off rehab for some type of surgery: defensive back Tony Conner (knee), defensive tackle Issac Gross (neck), defensive end Brown (foot) and offensive linemen Rod Taylor (shoulder) and Robert Conyers (knee). Gross' surgery was actually last fall since he was injured in the season opener. He is furthest along, though all are expected to be healthy and ready to compete for starting jobs. In the case of Brown, Conner and Conyers, the jobs are available.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU Three of the Rebels' biggest recruits — defensive tackle Benito Jones and wide receivers A.J. Brown and DeKaylin Metcalf — competed in high school championship games at Ole Miss. Brown helped Starkville High School to the Class 6A title while Jones and Metcalf played against each other in a Class 5A game that was not decided until Jones helped Wayne County survive a goal-line stand in the final seconds.

EARLY BIRD FRESHMEN Eight Ole Miss freshmen enrolled early and participated in spring drills. One of them, quarterback Shea Patterson, is the backup to Kelly. The other early enrollees are offensive lineman Eli Johnson, defensive end Charles Wiley, tight end Gabe Angel, linebacker Donta Evans, defensive backs Greg Eisworth and Myles Hartsfield and defensive tackle Jones. Johnson played high school ball at Lafayette County High School in Oxford. Johnson lived at home for the spring semester, which allowed the scholarship check to stretch further.

REBUILDING AT RECEIVER The Rebels signed two of 247Sports' top 11 wide receivers in the 2015 class, and both are expected to make big impacts this season. Damarkus Lodge, the No. 6 receiver, appeared in eight games as a true freshman and had one catch, a 12-yard touchdown. Van Jefferson, the No. 11 receiver, redshirted in 2015. Lodge plays on the outside, Jefferson in the slot. Jefferson was described as a disciplined route runner in high school, not surprising as the son of a former NFL receiver and NFL assistant coach, Shawn Jefferson.

STAFF STABILITY Seven of nine assistant coaches with Freeze right now were members of his original Ole Miss staff, and four of those coached with Freeze at Arkansas State. Offensive coordinator Dan Werner coached with Freeze at Ole Miss on Ed Orgeron's staff and was coaching at an area high school before rejoining Freeze at Ole Miss in 2012. Freeze retained running backs coach Derrick Nix, who had been a part of Houston Nutt's Ole Miss staff. The only assistants hired during Freeze's tenure are safeties coach Corey Batoon, who coached with Freeze at Arkansas State, and co-defensive coordinator and cornerbacks coach Jason Jones, who came over from Oklahoma State.

QB CHAD KELLY

RUNNING BACKS Departed senior Jaylen Walton was a threat in the passing game, but Akeem Judd and Jordan Wilkins are bigger backs who should be able to get more done between the tackles. Both grew in their ability to gain yards after contact and were often "winning the collision" at the end of last season. Carries were limited behind Walton and Kelly, but Judd and Wilkins both averaged more than 5.0 yards per carry last year. Wilkins rushed for four touchdowns, Judd three. Redshirt freshman Eric Swinney is one to watch at the position. He was the only running back in the 2015 signing class, but an injury kept him from getting on the field last year.

RECEIVERS There is plenty of talent, and it's not all inexperienced. At 6'2", 220 pounds, junior Damore'ea Stringfellow has the body type to be a physical receiver. Senior Quincy Adeboyejo has track speed. They combined for 74 catches and 12 touchdowns last year. Freeze says he's intent on getting the ball to athletic senior tight end Evan Engram more often. Engram, who could also play slot receiver, had 38 catches in 2015. Sophomore Damarkus Lodge and redshirt freshman Van Jefferson were rated among the top 15 receivers in the 2015 class, and freshman A.J. Brown is another big-bodied type at 6'1", 225.

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (5)					
WR	3	Damore'ea Stringfellow (Jr.)	**8**	**Quincy Adeboyejo (Sr.)**
WR	11	Markell Pack (Jr.)	12	Van Jefferson (Fr.)
WR	5	Damarkus Lodge (So.)	19	Derrick Jones (Sr.)
LT		Greg Little (Fr.)	67	Alex Givens (Fr.)
LG	79	Javon Patterson (So.)	55	Tyler Putman (So.)
C	**50**	**Sean Rawlings (So.)**	75	Robert Conyers (Sr.)
RG	70	Jordan Sims (So.)	73	Rod Taylor (Jr.)
RT	**75**	**Robert Conyers (Sr.)**	78	Jeremy Liggins (Sr.)
TE	**17**	**Evan Engram (Sr.)**	84	Hunter Thurley (Sr.)
QB	**10**	**Chad Kelly (Sr.)**	20	Shea Patterson (Fr.)
RB	21	Akeem Judd (Sr.)	22	Jordan Wilkins (Jr.)
DEFENSE (5)				
DE	**10**	**Marquis Haynes (Jr.)**	98	Charles Wiley (Fr.)
DT	9	Breeland Speaks (So.)	91	Ross Donelly (So.)
NT	93	D.J. Jones (Sr.)	94	Issac Gross (Sr.)
DE	**6**	**Fadol Brown (Sr.)**	47	John Youngblood (Sr.)
MLB		Rommel Mageo (Sr.)		Detric Bing-Dukes (So.)
OLB	31	DeMarquis Gates (Jr.)	21	Terry Caldwell (Sr.)
NB	**12**	**Tony Conner (Sr.)**	15	Myles Hartsfield (Fr.)
CB	**1**	**Tony Bridges (Sr.)**	16	Jalen Julius (Fr.)
CB	**5**	**Kendarius Webster (Jr.)**	13	Kailo Moore (Sr.)
SS	36	Zedrick Woods (So.)	29	Armani Linton (Fr.)
FS	4	C.J. Hampton (Jr.)	30	A.J. Moore (Jr.)
SPECIAL TEAMS				
K	97	Gary Wunderlich (Jr.)	KR	22 Jordan Wilkins (Jr.)
P	94	Will Gleeson (Jr.)	PR	1 Tony Bridges (Sr.)

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN Five-star signee Greg Little was recruited to be Tunsil's replacement. Freeze says that Little "has the best feet in America." Though podiatrists have yet to weigh in on that claim, Little is extremely athletic and could very well be the starter when the Rebels open the season Sept. 5 against Florida State. If so, he'll be filling big shoes — even Tunsil wasn't the starter on opening day as a true freshman. It was hard to get a read on the line sans Tunsil in the spring, because Little and other key components were not around. Senior tackle Robert Conyers and junior guard Rod Taylor were both out with injury. Conyers is expected to start at right tackle, and Taylor will compete for a guard spot. A new center must be found, and if no one grabs the job, then sophomore Javon Patterson could slide over from left guard. Jeremy Liggins, a successful 300-pound quarterback in high school and junior college, should contribute at one or both tackles.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN Nkemdiche is a big loss from a talent and potential standpoint, but his production was another matter. D.J. Jones, a first-year junior college transfer last year, and sophomore Breeland Speaks held up nicely in the Sugar Bowl when Nkemdiche was suspended. That wasn't the only playing time for Jones and Speaks. Starting ends Marquis Haynes and Fadol Brown are back. Haynes was a second-team All-SEC pick and tied a school record with 10 sacks. Brown is bigger and can slide over to tackle if necessary. Freshman tackle Benito Jones enrolled early and gained some snaps in the spring. The wild card that could make the group even better is undersized senior Issac Gross. He missed virtually all of 2015 with a neck injury that required surgery. It's not the first time in his career that Gross has been injured. When healthy, he's made a living in opponents' backfields with 27.5 tackles for a loss for his career.

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH Hugh Freeze
RECORD AT SCHOOL 34-18 (4 years)
CAREER RECORD 64-24 (7 years)
OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS Matt Luke, Dan Werner
DEFENSIVE COORDINATORS Jason Jones, Dave Wommack
LOCATION Oxford, MS
STADIUM Vaught-Hemingway Stadium (60,580)

KEY REBELS

CHAD KELLY, QB Former Clemson Tiger was outstanding in his first season at Ole Miss, passing for 4,042 yards and 31 touchdowns. He enters the 2016 season as the top quarterback in the SEC.

EVAN ENGRAM, TE The 2015 second-team all-conference pick ranks fourth among the SEC's returning players in receiving yards. He's the school's career leader in catches (97) and yards (1,394) for a tight end.

DAMORE'EA STRINGFELLOW, WR Washington transfer flourished in the shadow of Laquon Treadwell with 503 yards and five touchdowns.

TONY CONNER, DB Nickel back was projected first-round draft pick before knee injury at Alabama in Week 3. Expected to be fully healed. Led SEC defensive backs with nine tackles for a loss in 2014.

MARQUIS HAYNES, DE Earned second-team All-SEC honors and tied school record with 10 sacks last season. Third in the SEC with 17.5 sacks over the last two seasons.

KEY LOSSES

LAREMY TUNSIL, OT Strong and athletic left tackle was an elite recruit and lived up to the hype. Will go down as one of the best players in school history.

LAQUON TREADWELL, WR Ole Miss' all-time leader in receptions (202) despite playing only three seasons. Returned from leg injury to have an outstanding junior season.

ROBERT NKEMDICHE, DT Drew some criticism when production did not always match enormous ability, but he impacted every play.

MIKE HILTON, DB Small defensive back was a big hitter. Had the versatility to play every position in the secondary.

TRAE ELSTON, DB Four-year starter earned second-team All-America honors at safety in 2015. Second on the team with 66 tackles as a senior.

RISING STAR

The Rebels' secondary was stocked with veteran talent last season, but **Zedrick Woods** impressed the coaching staff as a freshman with his quick adaptation to the college game. Woods, a former high school teammate of Rebel legend Laremy Tunsil, will settle in at strong safety in 2016.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 OLE MISS ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
16 Davis, Drew	6-1/208	Sr.	Bonita Springs, FL
10 Kelly, Chad	6-2/215	Sr.	Buffalo, NY
20 Patterson, Shea	6-2/195	Fr.	Shreveport, LA
7 Pellerin, Jason	6-4/229	Fr.	New Iberia, LA

RUNNING BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
13 Brazley, Eugene	5-9/189	Jr.	New Orleans, LA
35 Buford, D.K.	5-11/221	So.	Oxford, MS
39 Johnson, Martin	6-0/192	Sr.	Preston, MS
21 Judd, Akeem	5-11/222	Sr.	Durham, NC
24 Swinney, Eric	5-9/197	Fr.	Riverdale, GA
33 Vanderburg, Nathan	5-7/167	Jr.	Olive Branch, MS
22 Wilkins, Jordan	6-1/214	Jr.	Cordova, TN

RECEIVERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
8 Adeboyejo, Quincy	6-3/195	Sr.	Cedar Hill, TX
81 Bledsoe, Trey	6-1/213	Jr.	Grenada, MS
12 Jefferson, Van	6-2/181	Fr.	Brentwood, TN
19 Jones, Derrick	6-2/189	Sr.	Eupora, MS
7 Lodge, Damarkus	6-2/190	So.	Cedar Hill, TX
27 Luke, Cale	6-1/197	Jr.	Clinton, MS
11 Pack, Markell	6-2/193	Jr.	Purvis, MS
3 Stringfellow, Damore'ea	6-2/220	Jr.	Perris, CA
85 Weber, Alex	6-1/185	So.	Lake City, FL

TIGHT ENDS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
83 Angel, Gabe	6-3/218	Fr.	Cookeville, TN
17 Engram, Evan	6-3/227	Sr.	Powder Springs, GA
80 Hibbler, Willie	6-3/238	Fr.	Sardis, MS
85 Knox, Dawson	6-4/222	Fr.	Nashville, TN
43 Quick, Ty	6-3/257	Jr.	Terry, MS
84 Thurley, Hunter	6-4/232	Sr.	Nashville, TN
89 Zettergren, Taz	6-3/218	Sr.	Senatobia, MS

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
76 Bouldin, Daronte	6-5/327	Jr.	Canton, MS
77 Buys, Talbot	6-8/310	Sr.	Vicksburg, MS
75 Conyers, Robert	6-5/290	Sr.	Miami, FL
63 Feeley, Jacob	6-2/273	Sr.	Picayune, MS
67 Givens, Alex	6-6/293	Fr.	Nashville, TN
52 Howard, Michael	6-5/232	Fr.	Green Cove Springs, FL
61 Johnson, Eli	6-3/295	Fr.	Taylor, MS
54 Johnson, Sam	6-2/240	Fr.	Nashville, TN
78 Liggins, Jeremy	6-3/302	Sr.	Oxford, MS
79 Patterson, Javon	6-3/307	So.	Petal, MS
55 Putman, Tyler	6-4/300	So.	Olive Branch, MS
50 Rawlings, Sean	6-5/280	So.	Madison, MS
70 Sims, Jordan	6-4/334	So.	Homewood, AL
73 Taylor, Rod	6-3/320	Jr.	Jackson, MS

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
6 Brown, Fadol	6-4/280	Sr.	Charleston, SC
91 Donelly, Ross	6-1/309	So.	Houston, TX
14 Evans, Victor	6-3/238	So.	Dallas, TX
94 Gross, Issac	6-1/240	Sr.	Batesville, MS
10 Haynes, Marquis	6-3/220	Jr.	Jacksonville, FL
96 Hebert, Jordan	6-0/230	So.	Klein, TX
95 Jones, Benito	6-1/285	Fr.	Waynesboro, MS
93 Jones, D.J.	6-0/324	Sr.	Greenville, SC
42 McDowell, Garrald	6-2/240	So.	Covington, LA
99 Moore, Herbert	6-1/322	Jr.	Memphis, TN
45 Pittman, Tyler	6-0/232	Jr.	Corinth, MS
52 Robinson, Austrian	6-4/292	Fr.	New York, NY
9 Speaks, Breeland	6-3/313	So.	Jackson, MS
98 Wiley, Charles	6-2/240	Fr.	Stockbridge, GA
47 Youngblood, John	6-3/255	Sr.	Trussville, AL

LINEBACKERS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
44 Ashlock, Alex	6-2/225	Jr.	Cordova, TN
21 Caldwell, Terry	6-1/216	Sr.	Wilmington, NC
34 Curtis, Shawn	6-3/247	Fr.	Doral, FL
37 Davis, Luke	6-2/216	Jr.	Trussville, AL
35 Evans, Donta	6-1/222	Fr.	Lawrenceville, GA
31 Gates, DeMarquis	6-2/217	Jr.	Hampton, GA
80 Markuson, Elliot	6-0/235	Jr.	Oxford, MS
24 Polk, Tayler	5-11/212	Jr.	Magee, MS
48 Raborn, Jack	6-1/217	So.	Advance, NC
33 Sherling, John-Patrick	5-11/224	Jr.	Fairhope, AL
22 Smith, Ray Ray	6-2/213	Jr.	Florence, AL
32 Strong, Temario	6-0/211	Sr.	Batesville, MS

DEFENSIVE BACKS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
1 Bridges, Tony	6-0/183	Sr.	Collins, MS
12 Conner, Tony	6-0/215	Sr.	Batesville, MS
25 Custis, Montrell	6-0/174	Fr.	Jonesboro, GA
23 Davis, Carlos	5-8/171	Sr.	Birmingham, AL
11 Eisworth, Greg	5-11/180	Fr.	Grand Prairie, TX
4 Hampton, C.J.	6-0/179	Jr.	Meridian, MS
15 Hartsfield, Myles	6-0/190	Fr.	Sayreville, NJ
16 Julius, Jalen	6-0/180	Fr.	Winter Garden, FL
29 Linton, Armani	6-2/206	Fr.	Walnut, MS
30 Moore, A.J.	6-0/199	Jr.	Bassfield, MS
26 Moore, C.J.	5-11/190	Jr.	Bassfield, MS
13 Moore, Kailo	5-10/195	Sr.	Rosedale, MS
28 Ordway, Cam	5-11/174	So.	Pulaski, TN
41 Smith, Antwain	5-9/175	Jr.	Southaven, MS
5 Webster, Kendarius	5-11/180	Jr.	Stockbridge, GA
36 Woods, Zedrick	5-11/197	So.	Lake City, FL

SPECIALISTS	HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
62 Darney, Kamden (LS)	6-2/220	Fr.	Los Angeles, CA
53 Few, Will (LS)	6-3/232	Sr.	Augusta, GA
94 Gleeson, Will (P)	6-3/197	Jr.	Melbourne, Australia
93 Jackson, Tyler (K)	5-11/185	Sr.	Oxford, MS
57 Lamar, Chadwick (LS)	6-1/212	So.	Oxford, MS
91 Noble, Nathan (K)	6-3/224	Sr.	Greenville, MS
58 Taylor, Michael (LS)	6-3/185	Fr.	Jackson, TN
98 Warren, Grant (P)	6-1/201	Jr.	Pascagoula, MS
97 Wunderlich, Gary (K/P)	6-0/188	Jr.	Memphis, TN

Scouting the REBELS

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP OLE MISS

"They're a force in recruiting, and it shows when you go to those big bowl games in back-to-back years. They don't have the depth of an Alabama, but individually they have some of the most talented players in the country. ... I definitely think the strength of that team is their defense, but they'll always be good enough on offense to win games. Their wideout group was the best we played all year. You watched their guys match up with some of the best corners in the league, and they were always open. ... I think Chad Kelly is a little more sporadic and not as refined as many people think, but as a team they were really, really skilled. ... Obviously Laquon Treadwell was a difference-maker, so it's going to be hard to replace him, but their No. 2 and No. 3 guys were pretty darn good, too. ... They're just average on the offensive line, and they got exposed a little bit when [Laremy] Tunsil was out, so I'm sure that tackle position is somewhat of a concern to have to plug in a freshman there. ... My guess is they'll probably be as good as Chad Kelly is. He'll have another year under his belt, but he was feast-or-famine, sort of a Johnny Manziel-type guy. I think he's extremely immature, and his history speaks to that, but he's got a big arm and a lot of natural ability. ... In the backfield, they're just average. They don't really run it, and they do a lot of that run/pass option stuff; kind of what the league has become. If their wideouts are anything like last year, those guys give you a chance."

2015 RESULTS

RECORD: 10-3, 6-2 (SEC)

Sept.	5	Tennessee-Martin	W	76-3
Sept.	12	Fresno State	W	73-21
Sept.	19	at Alabama	W	43-37
Sept.	26	Vanderbilt	W	27-16
Oct.	3	at Florida	L	10-38
Oct.	10	New Mexico State	W	52-3
Oct.	17	at Memphis	L	24-37
Oct.	24	Texas A&M	W	23-3
Oct.	31	at Auburn	W	27-19
Nov.	7	Arkansas (ot)	L	52-53
Nov.	21	LSU	W	38-17
Nov.	28	at Mississippi State	W	38-27
Jan.	1	vs. Oklahoma State #	W	48-20

#Sugar Bowl

DEMARQUIS GATES

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Chad Kelly	**458**	**298**	**4,042**	**31**	**13**
Ryan Buchanan	13	8	96	2	1

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Jaylen Walton	142	730	5.1	5
Chad Kelly	**107**	**500**	**4.7**	**10**
Akeem Judd	**77**	**421**	**5.5**	**3**
Jordan Wilkins	**72**	**379**	**5.3**	**4**

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Laquon Treadwell	82	1,153	14.1	11
Quincy Adeboyejo	**38**	**604**	**15.9**	**7**
Evan Ingram	**38**	**464**	**12.2**	**2**
Cody Core	37	644	17.4	4

KICKING: **Gary Wunderlich, 19-25 FGs, 63-63 XPs, 120 points**

TACKLES: **DeMarquis Gates, 76; Two players tied with 70**

SACKS: **Marquis Haynes, 10.0**

INTERCEPTIONS: Trae Elston, 4

Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	40.8 ppg	1	8
Rushing	183.1 ypg	7	45
Passing	334.7 ypg	1	10
Total	517.8 ypg	1	10

DEFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	22.6 ppg	8	33
Rushing	127.1 ypg	4	23
Passing	258.8 ypg	13	105
Total	385.8 ypg	9	54

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
0	0.00	9	66

TONY CONNER

LINEBACKERS Freeze was not able to help a thin position in the middle to the level that he would have preferred on Signing Day, but he kept recruiting. As a result, he reeled in a graduate transfer in Rommel Mageo, whose 87 tackles at Oregon State last season would have led Ole Miss, and late junior college signee Detric Bing-Dukes, who played at Georgia before moving on to Iowa Western Community College. One of the two transfers will start in the middle. Freeze was comfortable enough in the spring to say Mageo "may be the guy." The outside linebacker in the Rebels' 4-2-5 is a rising star in junior DeMarquis Gates, who led the team with 76 tackles in 2015 despite starting only four games. Gates' role increased when senior Denzel Nkemdiche was dismissed from the team after the Arkansas game. Senior Terry Caldwell is the only other linebacker with starting experience, and that was just three games.

DEFENSIVE BACKS Ole Miss must replace both starting safeties, but nickel back Tony Conner has star potential. Conner was getting some buzz as a possible first-round pick in 2016 before he tore his MCL in the Rebels' win at Alabama. Two surgeries have followed, but Conner appears to be ready for his senior season. Junior C.J. Hampton will start at free safety, and the staff is eager to see him take the next step in his development. Zedrick Woods proved to be a fast study with a football IQ that allowed him to play several secondary positions as a freshman. He should further blossom by concentrating only on strong safety. Tony Bridges and Kendarius Webster return as the starting cornerbacks. The light began to come on late last season for Bridges, a first-year junior college transfer. His pick-6 off of Mississippi State quarterback Dak Prescott in the regular-season finale was an example of his playmaking ability. The staff was excited about prep school safety Myles Hartsfield, an early enrollee freshman, in the spring. Incoming freshman Deontay Anderson, the No. 2 safety according to 247Sports, could help out as well.

SPECIALISTS Junior kicker Gary Wunderlich hit 19-of-25 field goal attempts and converted all 63 PATs to become the SEC's top scorer at the position. Wunderlich doubled as the team's distance punter. Freeze would like to use junior punter Will Gleeson, a rugby-style kicker, more often and is hopeful that Gleeson will bounce back after struggling late last season. Ole Miss is seeking playmakers at the return positions where the name of the game in 2015 was "Don't Turn It Over."

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	29.8	70
DEFENSE	30.1	72
MARGIN	-0.3	72
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	50.4%	4
DEFENSE	38.2%	34
MARGIN	+12.2%	4
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	7.1	4
DEFENSE	4.9	22
MARGIN	+2.2	1
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	5.1	14
DEFENSE	3.9	24
MARGIN	+1.2	6
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	2.4	36
ACTUAL	0	66
MARGIN	-2.4	99

NUMBERS TO KNOW

KEY: **1**-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

1.18 Ole Miss averaged 5.1 points per scoring opportunity (first downs inside the opponent's 40), 14th in the country. Meanwhile, the Rebels' defense allowed just 3.9 points per opportunity (24th). The plus-1.2-point margin was sixth in the country and first in the SEC. You can win a lot of games by both creating more opportunities than your opponent and converting them better.

2.2 You can also win a lot of games by simply outgaining your opponents. Ole Miss' yardage margin of 2.2 yards per play was first in not only the SEC, but all of FBS. The Rebels averaged 7.1 yards per play (fourth in FBS) and allowed just 4.9 (22nd). And if not for a midseason bout with defensive injuries, the margin might have been even higher.

67.5 The midseason blip was noticeable when looking at the Vegas lines. Ole Miss beat the spread by a combined 36 points in wins over Fresno State and Alabama, then underachieved it by a combined 67.5 points in their next four games. The rebound was significant (plus-49.5 points in the final six games), but the slump was costly.

22.5 Ole Miss' defensive front was immovable in 2015. The Rebels allowed just 49.1 percent of short-yardage conversions (third or fourth down with 1 or 2 yards to go, or any goal-to-go rush inside the 3-yard line), fifth in the country. Offenses are supposed to have the advantage in short yardage. They did not against Ole Miss.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION

Offensive Linemen	6
Defensive Backs	4
Running Backs	2
Wide Receivers	3
Tight Ends	3
Linebackers	3
Defensive Linemen	2
Quarterbacks	1
Athletes	1

BY STATE

Mississippi	6
Georgia	5
Texas	5
Tennessee	3
Florida	2
Alabama	1
Illinois	1
Louisiana	1
New Jersey	1

No single player on a talented 2015 Ole Miss roster was more notable than Laremy Tunsil. When the star left tackle returned from a seven-game suspension, the Rebels went 5–1 and scored 52 points in their only loss. Tunsil is gone to the NFL, but Ole Miss coach Hugh Freeze believes he's found the successor at left tackle in five-star recruit Greg Little. The Texas native was ranked the No. 3 overall prospect in the nation by the 247Sports Composite and is by far the most heralded of the Rebels' six offensive line signees. Tackle Bryce Mathews, at No. 245, is the only other offensive line signee ranked among the top 250 players in the nation.

The No. 4 overall recruit, quarterback Shea Patterson, was impressive in spring drills and offers long-term stability at a position in which the post-Eli Manning Rebels have often relied upon transfers. Patterson played at IMG Academy in Florida.

Freeze continued to load up at the wide receiver position with physical outside candidates in A.J. Brown and DeKaylin Metcalf and a speedy inside type in Tre Nixon. All three were four-star prospects.

Defensively, tackle Benito Jones, end Charles Wiley and safety Myles Hartsfield all have the opportunity for early playing time. All three enrolled early and competed in spring drills. Jones, the No. 24-ranked prospect nationally, is a big, physical presence at a position where the Rebels lose starters Woodrow Hamilton and All-American Robert Nkemdiche. Wiley impressed coaches in drills with his athleticism and quickness that at times compensated for being out of position. Freeze believes Wiley can become a solid pass rusher off the edge. Hartsfield played nickel back in the spring, but coaches say he has the football IQ to play any position in the secondary.

SPOTLIGHT ON

A.J. BROWN

WR • STARKVILLE, MS

A.J. Brown was ready for the question. One of the top wide receivers in the country, Brown had Mississippi State — an SEC school — in his hometown just minutes from his doorstep. He chose not only to sign elsewhere, but also to sign with the school's biggest rival.

Why?

"Honestly, they didn't do a really good job of recruiting me," Brown says. "They came to see me like once. I used to go out there all the time. Nobody (coaches) really knew that. They didn't do a good job of recruiting, point blank and simple."

So with that perception of indifference, Brown struck the Bulldogs from his list and cast his lot with Ole Miss.

He is the No. 38 overall prospect and the No. 5 wide receiver in the 247Sports rankings. Brown is the first player from tradition-rich Starkville High School to sign with Ole Miss since tight end Eric Rice in 2000.

As a senior, Brown helped lead Starkville to the Class 6A championship and from there was named co-MVP of the Mississippi-Alabama All-Star game with nine catches for 137 yards and two touchdowns.

Listed at 6'1", 225 pounds, he physically resembles Laquon Treadwell, one of the top wide receivers in Ole Miss history, a guy he will be tasked with helping to replace.

Prior to Signing Day, Brown re-tweeted a photo that had been edited to show him and Treadwell lined up next to one another.

Brown believes he and Treadwell share similar characteristics. "We do actually," he says, "but I've got a long way to go to get to where he's at."

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
Deontay Anderson	S	6-1/212	Manvel, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	53
Gabe Angel	TE	6-2/222	Cookeville, TN	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	332
Detric Bing-Dukes	LB	6-0/230	Tucker, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	174*
A.J. Brown	WR	6-1/225	Starkville, MS	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	38
Justin Connor	ATH	5-10/187	Sardis, MS	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	323
Octavious Cooley	TE	6-3/254	Laurel, MS	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	174
Jack DeFoor	OT	6-4/276	Calhoun, GA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	670
Greg Eisworth	S	5-11/180	Grand Prairie, TX	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	563
Donta Evans	ILB	6-1/222	Lawrenceville, GA	★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	600
Myles Hartsfield	S	5-10/197	Sayreville, NJ	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	3*
Eli Johnson	OC	6-1/287	Taylor, MS	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	485
Benito Jones	DT	6-1/305	Waynesboro, MS	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	24
Jaylon Jones	CB	5-11/171	Allen, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	220
Gregory Little	OT	6-6/326	Allen, TX	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	3
Bryce Mathews	OT	6-6/275	Brentwood, TN	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	246
Jacob Mathis	TE	6-4/228	Tampa, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	339
DeKaylin Metcalf	WR	6-4/206	Oxford, MS	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	112
Royce Newman	OT	6-5/260	Nashville, IL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	347
Tre Nixon	WR	6-1/170	Viera, FL	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	182
Shea Patterson	QB	6-2/198	Shreveport, LA	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	4
D'Vaughn Pennamon	RB	5-11/214	Manvel, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	240
Jarrion Street	RB	6-2/207	Trussville, AL	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	619
Tariqious Tisdale	LB	6-5/249	Lexington, TN	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	746
Chandler Tuitt	OG	6-4/220	Tyrone, GA	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	483
Charles Wiley	DE	6-2/250	Stockbridge, GA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	270

*junior college transfer

STAYING POWER

A series of star-studded recruiting classes will keep Ole Miss relevant in the brutal SEC West

BY STEVEN GODFREY

It's mid-April and Hugh Freeze is in new territory yet again. The fifth-year Ole Miss head coach is wrapping up spring practice without a Spring Game. Vaught-Hemingway Stadium is undergoing another massive renovation, part of a program-wide upgrade brought on by the success of Freeze's 34–18 run over four seasons.

In a week's time Freeze will be in Chicago to escort a gaggle of Rebels from his famous 2013 signing class as they become the school's biggest and brightest NFL Draft class. Laremy Tunsil, Laquon Treadwell and Robert Nkemdiche will provide the Ole Miss brand a level of attention usually reserved for powerhouse programs like Florida State and Alabama.

"It's a first time for a lot of things. That's OK, these are pretty good firsts," he says laughing.

Freeze has never been to the NFL Draft. He's never dealt with so many league personnel on campus in one offseason. He's never guided a player through the drama of being a top-10 pick. Ole Miss had to hire security and issue credentials for the team's Pro Day in March, a first for the school.

"We've had to tell recruits for years, when other schools mention that we haven't put as many players in the NFL, that we haven't had our first full class draftable yet," Freeze says. "Now we'll be able to show and not tell for the first time. What we're sending out is going to be comparable to what we'll have as we make those next steps."

None of this was supposed to happen to Freeze and Ole Miss — the massive influx of talent, the New Year's Day bowl game appearances, the back-to-back wins over Alabama. And with the SEC culture's fiercely traditional mindset, now that the headliners of Freeze's 2013 mega class have cycled out, many are expecting the Rebels to regress.

After all, there's no worse place to build a program than the nuclear landscape of the SEC's Western Division. Since Freeze took over a moribund 2–10 program in 2011, programs like Texas A&M, Arkansas and Auburn have rebuilt, rehired, exploded and then retracted. It's a brutal way of life, and in no way is Ole Miss immune to regression. But are they going away anytime soon? Maybe not.

Familiar faces have bred consistency

When Freeze was hired in Oxford, the Houston Nutt era had rendered Ole Miss an unwinnable dead-end job for assistants, and the 42-year-old's relative inexperience as an FBS head coach (one year at Arkansas State) didn't bode well for young coaches looking to move up.

To compensate, Freeze turned to familiar faces: former Ed Orgeron-era offensive coordinator Dan Werner, Duke offensive line coach and former Rebel player and coach Matt Luke, and former Georgia Tech defensive coordinator Dave Wommack, his DC in Jonesboro.

That core has remained intact five seasons in, and since the start of the 2014 season, the only SEC program without a coordinator change is Ole Miss. The consistency that tenured assistants create in recruiting is an obvious benefit, but schematically, the Rebels have been without any kind of overhaul since Freeze's hire. Spring scrimmages and additional practices during bowl season are technique-focused for Ole Miss — they're never having to install new concepts wholesale.

"I'm not sure if it's necessarily better or worse than other places, but the family atmosphere here is unique, and it's consistent. And I think for a certain type of player that's an advantage we have in recruiting," Freeze says.

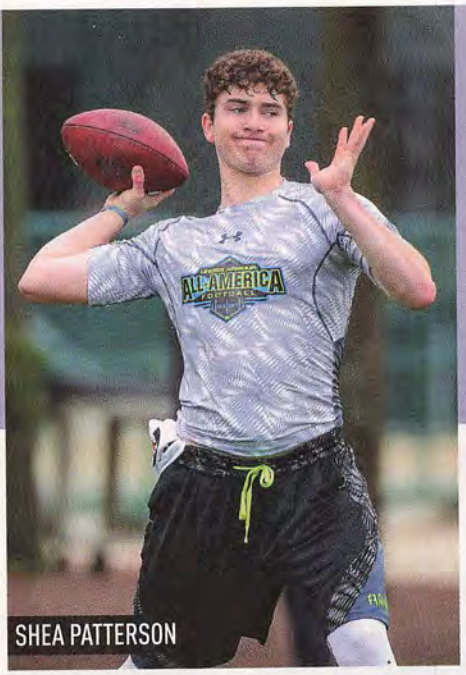
It's a strong possibility that if the 60-year-old Wommack steps down anytime soon, defensive line coach Chris Kiffin, brother of Lane, will step up to the role. Freeze has been dogged both publicly and privately about developing and retaining "his" coaches, an almost extinct philosophy employed by top-25 programs.

Chad Kelly is (probably) the best QB in the SEC

Minus Treadwell and Tunsil, this is in no way a more talented offense entering 2016, but with a mature senior quarterback setting the tone, it's one of the league's most experienced.

Mature. Leader. After his implosion at Clemson and his arrest outside of a nightclub in Buffalo, this Chad Kelly was never supposed to happen. The junior college transfer killed off the reputation of "off-field character concern" with an unbelievable stat line during his junior

Freeze, Kelly, Engram: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports; Patterson: AP


SHEA PATTERSON

season in Oxford — 4,042 yards passing for 31 touchdowns, plus another 10 rushing (and a clean, quiet off-field record).

"I think Chad's development, I wouldn't say we were surprised because we knew what kind of talent he had, but it's been a process of making him understand the amount of responsibility it would take for him to fulfill that," Freeze says.

If you had to name a better quarterback in the league entering Labor Day weekend, who beats Kelly? Tennessee's Josh Dobbs? LSU's Brandon Harris? Georgia true freshman Jacob Eason? The list is thin.

Kelly loses massive NFL talent at left tackle and wide receiver, but there's still a full battery of options in the passing game: Evan Engram opted to bypass the draft to play his senior season at Ole Miss, and Freeze considers the tight end's versatility and experience to be the key to the entire passing offense. No one can fill Treadwell's shoes, but the offense has a stable of receivers — Quincy Adeboyejo, Damore'ea Stringfellow and 2015 blue-chip recruit Damarkus Lodge — that's deep enough to open the field.

It's logical to think that with a brutal 2016 schedule — Florida State, Alabama and Georgia are on the docket, and that's just September — Ole Miss will regress, but even if it's a bridge year, Kelly could be the difference between a .500 campaign and another major bowl.

There's a future to recruit to

With Freeze's offensive system — a modern amalgamation of up-tempo, spread and zone running — Ole Miss has enjoyed a level of production at QB unseen since Eli Manning, and with little raw talent: As a transfer, Kelly was considered a reclamation project. Same for Bo Wallace, the only college football player in history to lose a spring QB competition at Arkansas State and go on to beat Alabama.

In January, five-star quarterback Shea Patterson enrolled at Ole Miss. Aside from the fanfare surrounding Nkemdiche, Patterson is the biggest fish Freeze has pulled in his boat to date. The Rebels have options for their talented freshman: Patterson can redshirt or back up the established senior starter on a comfortable pace to take over in '17 and beyond.

Meanwhile, Freeze's staff can recruit blue chips to complement Patterson the way Nkemdiche's signing attracted other defensive stars. Tunsil's replacement has already been locked in: The nation's No. 1 tackle, Greg Little, signed with Ole Miss in February and is expected to start on the left side in Week 1 vs. Florida State.

College football fans have long memories — recruits do not

Baylor's Art Briles has run a similar overhaul with a formerly mediocre Power 5 brand and is fond of judging perception not by decades or record books, but in teenage years. High school football players only know success defined in their lifetimes, and an 18-year-old in the 2017 signing class was in middle school when Freeze started winning in Oxford.

The secret advantage of 2013 is that underneath the marquee names, Freeze's staff quietly assembled a complete class filled with SEC-caliber players at almost every position. The 2013 class ranked fourth in the 247Sports Composite team ranking, and the 2016 reload — highlighted by Patterson and Little — ranked seventh. The major difference is that no one is questioning the decision-making of the 2016 superstars.

"Oh yeah, there were a few people who thought I was crazy for coming [to Ole Miss]" Treadwell says. "But when you look around and see all these scouts, and to see how many of us are at a pro day and the attention … this is what we believed back then. This was the dream [we] wanted."

The 2013 and 2016 classes garnered the headlines, but Freeze also signed top-20 classes in '14 and '15 to stock the roster with SEC-caliber players at every position. Freeze estimates that the 2011 roster he inherited had a talent level comparable to a program with a heavy scholarship probation.

That's what's still probably lost on outsiders who only see Nkemdiche and Treadwell: Outside of the headliners, the floor at Ole Miss has risen just as far as the ceiling since those bad old days. Every program takes a step back when a superstar leaves for the NFL, but how far back is determined by the talent behind those players. Privately, Ole Miss coaches note that the post-2013 classes were actually deeper.

"It's been obvious in the calls we've had with recruits that the air around the program has changed since we've started." Freeze says. "Certainly that [2013] class changed the perception of what could be accomplished here, but I don't think it was just one player signing, like a Robert Nkemdiche. We've had to build from class to class, from player to player, to try and keep aiming for that elite status. I don't know if we're there yet, but we feel closer."

CHAD KELLY

EVAN ENGRAM

TEXAS A&M AGGIES

National Forecast: **28** /// *SEC West Prediction:* **5**

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	UCLA
Sept. 10	Prairie View
Sept. 17	at Auburn
Sept. 24	vs. Arkansas #
Oct. 1	at South Carolina
Oct. 8	Tennessee
Oct. 22	at Alabama
Oct. 29	New Mexico State
Nov. 5	at Mississippi State
Nov. 12	Ole Miss
Nov. 19	UTSA
Nov. 24	LSU

#Arlington, TX

Voices of discontent are being heard around Aggieland for the first time in coach Kevin Sumlin's tenure. Three consecutive late-season fades and second-division finishes in the SEC West Division have led to an increasingly disgruntled fan base. However, if the Aggies' season can be as good and productive as their offseason, Sumlin could quickly turn those jeers back into cheers. The program appeared on the verge of crashing last December when quarterbacks Kyle Allen and Kyler Murray both announced they were transferring. Since then, though, Sumlin landed former Oklahoma quarterback Trevor Knight, perhaps the nation's most coveted graduate transfer. He followed that by hiring accomplished offensive coordinator Noel Mazzone away from UCLA and also added popular offensive line coach Jim Turner and highly regarded defensive line coach David Turner. The hope is that Mazzone and Jim Turner can boost a lackluster running game and rejuvenate an offense that struggled to reach the end zone. Yet, the demands on A&M's offense may be eased if the Aggies defense is able to make dramatic progress against the run in its second season under the supervision of John Chavis.

DAESHON HALL

QUARTERBACKS A&M will have a different starting quarterback for the seventh straight season opener. The situation has been so chaotic that the Aggies entered spring with last year's second-stringer at Oklahoma (Knight) battling last year's third-stringer at A&M (Jake Hubenak). Knight starred in a Sugar Bowl victory over Alabama in 2013 and passed for 2,300 yards in 2014, but he lost the starting job last season to Baker Mayfield. Knight was named A&M's starter following spring practice, but the coaching staff has confidence in a backup plan if he falters. Hubenak made his only start at A&M in last year's Music City Bowl after Allen and Murray announced they were transferring. Hubenak had a respectable showing with two touchdown passes in a 27–21 loss to Louisville. Knight, assuming he holds onto the job in preseason camp, doesn't need to be great, but he needs to emerge as an effective leader of Mazzone's system. Under Mazzone, the quarterback position has topped the 3,000-yard mark with at least 22 TDs in each of the past six seasons.

RUNNING BACKS Just as with quarterback, the Aggies are turning to a former Oklahoma second-teamer at running back. Keith Ford transferred after spending two years as backup. Ford is being counted on to provide a big-play element that the position has lacked. Tra Carson rushed for more than 1,000 yards last season but averaged only 68 yards against SEC West competition and did not have a run longer than 30 yards in the regular season. Ford, who rushed for 526 yards and six touchdowns at OU, demonstrated his big-play ability with a 56-yard run against Oklahoma State in 2014. The hope is that he can make similar big plays as a full-time starter. The Aggies also hope that Kendall Bussey and James White will be productive backups.

RECEIVERS The Aggies need a competent passer to surface because they have a glut of excellent receivers. All four starting receivers from last year return. Two of them are all-conference candidates. Christian Kirk, who caught 80 passes for 1,009 yards and seven touchdowns as a true freshman, figures to be even better as a sophomore. Senior Josh Reynolds, an All-SEC selection

THE VERDICT

2016 PROJECTION: 7-5, 3-5 SEC

Kevin Sumlin's seat is getting warm in College Station after winning a total of 11 league games in the last three seasons. The program has leaned on its offense since joining the SEC, but defense could provide the team's identity in 2016. The addition of coordinator John Chavis paid big dividends last year, and this unit — anchored by end Myles Garrett — should be one of the best in the SEC this season. The offense features a deep group of receivers and a talented running back in Keith Ford. However, there will be a new coordinator (Noel Mazzone) and a new quarterback (Oklahoma transfer Trevor Knight). How well those two mesh will go a long way in determining the Aggies' fortunes in 2016.

Postseason: Texas Bowl vs. Oklahoma State

5-YEAR WIN TREND

Hall: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports; Garrett: AP

OUTSIDE THE HUDDLE

THE CORNER MARKET A&M must find new starters to replace departed cornerbacks De'Vante Harris and Brandon Williams, but defensive coordinator John Chavis believes the Aggies will actually be better at that position in 2016. "We had some talent behind those two corners last year," Chavis says. "I think we will not fall off there at all and probably end up having more depth there than we did last year." Junior Priest Willis, a former four-star prospect who transferred from UCLA, will start on one side. Nick Harvey likely starts on the other side. He broke up four passes in a backup role in 2015.

STARTING OVER, AGAIN When the Aggies open the season on Sept. 3 against UCLA, they will do so with a different starting quarterback for the seventh consecutive season. An asterisk should be attached to that, because Matt Joeckel started the 2013 opener when Johnny Manziel was suspended for the first half, but there is no denying the instability at that position. Jerrod Johnson started in 2010, followed by Ryan Tannehill in '11. Manziel started the '12 opener, followed by Joeckel and then Kenny Hill, who transferred after the 2014 season. That resulted in the '15 opening start by Kyle Allen, who also transferred. With Allen gone, A&M's streak of revolving starting quarterbacks will continue into next season.

THE FRESHMAN WALL Although receiver Christian Kirk had more than 1,000 receiving yards as a true freshman, he admits that he wore down last season. He had only 316 receiving yards in the second half of the regular season. Kirk says he focused on increasing stamina during the offseason to ensure that a similar decline won't be repeated. "Those miles started adding up," Kirk says. "That's one thing I've really focused on is to keep my body at the high performance level it needs to be at for the whole, entire season."

MATTHEWS PIPELINE For the first time in more than a decade, Texas A&M will not have a son of Pro Football Hall of Famer Bruce Matthews on the roster. The graduation of center Mike Matthews ended a streak that began in 2005 with Kevin Matthews. Kevin completed his eligibility in 2009, but eventual All-American Jake Matthews joined the Aggies in 2010. Jake lettered from 2010 to 2013. However, the Matthews A&M presence hasn't ended; it's only been interrupted. A&M already has a commitment from 6'4", 310-pound Luke Matthews, the youngest and largest of Bruce's four sons. A junior at Elkins High School in Missouri City, Texas, Luke will be part of the Aggies' 2018 recruiting class.

FEAST OR FAMINE Bolstering the run defense and preventing big plays is a top priority for A&M, which was feast or famine against the run last season. The Aggies tied for third in the nation with 111 tackles for a loss. More than two-thirds of those (74) were on rushing plays. However, if they didn't make the tackle in the backfield, the Aggies too often made the tackle way downfield. A&M was 123rd in the nation in allowing long running plays from scrimmage. The Aggies gave up 98 runs that covered at least 10 yards and 27 that covered at least 20.

DE **MYLES GARRETT**

two years ago, has averaged 17 yards per catch and has 18 touchdown grabs in his career at A&M. They're so good that 6'5", 249-pound junior Ricky Seals-Jones is almost overlooked. He's trying to build on a breakout year in which he had 45 catches for 560 yards. That's not bad for a third option. In fact, he could be the Aggies' fourth option if junior Speedy Noil can avoid injuries that slowed him down in 2015. He's shown flashes of brilliance in his two seasons. Now, he needs to show consistency. A&M hasn't often used a tight end, and that doesn't figure to change. Mazzone previously has successfully utilized a tight end in his system, but no tight end on the roster had a catch last season for A&M.

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN The Aggies welcome the return of senior left tackle Avery Gennesy and sophomore guard Keaton Sutherland. Yet, they're seemingly even more enthusiastic about the offensive line returnee who doesn't show up on the depth chart. That's assistant Jim Turner, who is back in College Station after a stint with the NFL's Miami Dolphins. Previously, Turner helped recruit and develop the 2012 line that was composed of five future NFL players, including first-round draft picks Luke Joeckel, Jake Matthews and Cedric Ogbuehi. Turner is tasked with injecting a measure of toughness and improving the technique on a talented but underachieving unit that was inconsistent in run blocking and disappointing in pass protection. Gennesy, a former junior college transfer, was the best blocker in 2015 and figures to be better in his second year as a starter. The same goes for Sutherland, who was predictably inconsistent as a true freshman but started next to Gennesy in every game in the second half of the regular season. However, Sutherland is so talented he may move to right tackle to replace Germain Ifedi, who left early for the NFL. Should Sutherland remain at guard, then highly regarded sophomore Koda Martin, a converted tight end, would replace Ifedi. But if Sutherland shifts to tackle, Jermaine Eluemunor likely will fill Sutherland's old spot at left guard. A highly coveted junior college transfer in 2014, Eluemunor seemed to spend last season in the doghouse. He's gotten a new chance under Turner's supervision and had a strong showing in the spring. Sophomore Connor Lanfear looked good in the spring, too. The Aggies also will have a new starter at center, where redshirt freshman Erik McCoy moves in for the graduated three-year starter Mike Matthews.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN All-America junior Myles Garrett and senior Daeshon Hall have proven to be among the most productive sets of defensive ends in the country. They combined for 19.5 sacks in 2015 and will look to increase that total this year. Accomplishing that feat may depend on Hall, who doesn't draw the double- and triple-team blocks that Garrett does. Even though opponents are typically preoccupied with him, Garrett still managed to post 11.5 sacks as a freshman and 12.5 last season. At that rate, he should aim for 13.5 this season. That's very possible considering that Garrett's great talent is matched by his desire to improve. The Aggies need to improve

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	2	Speedy Noil (Jr.)	**4**	**Damion Ratley (Jr.)**
WR	9	**Ricky Seals-Jones (Jr.)**	15	Frank Iheanacho (So.)
WR	3	**Christian Kirk (So.)**	82	Boone Niederhofer (Sr.)
WR	11	**Josh Reynolds (Sr.)**	18	Edward Pope (Sr.)
LT	65	**Avery Gennesy (Sr.)**	50	Tank Davis (So.)
LG	78	**Keaton Sutherland (So.)**	70	Connor Lanfear (So.)
C	64	Erik McCoy (Fr.)	78	Keaton Sutherland (So.)
RG	72	Jermaine Eluemunor (Sr.)	71	Trevor Elbert (Fr.)
RT	75	Koda Martin (So.)	78	Keaton Sutherland (So.)
QB	8	Trevor Knight (Sr.)	10	Jake Hubenak (Jr.)
RB	21	Keith Ford (Jr.)	20	James White (Jr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	15	**Myles Garrett (Jr.)**	40	Jarrett Johnson (Jr.)
DT	5	Daylon Mack (So.)	98	Hardreck Walker (Sr.)
DT	88	Kingsley Keke (So.)	92	Zaycoven Henderson (Jr.)
DE	10	**Daeshon Hall (Sr.)**	9	Qualen Cunningham (Jr.)
OLB	42	Otaro Alaka (So.)	**33**	**Shaan Washington (Sr.)**
MLB	11	Josh Walker (Jr.)	31	Claude George (Sr.)
OLB	7	Richard Moore (So.)	31	Claude George (Sr.)
CB	24	Priest Willis (Jr.)	17	Alex Sezer (Sr.)
CB	8	Nick Harvey (Jr.)	**6**	**Donovan Wilson (Jr.)**
SS	14	**Justin Evans (Sr.)**	30	Justin Dunning (So.)
FS	23	**Armani Watts (Jr.)**	18	Larry Pryor (Fr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	36	Daniel LaCamera (So.)	KR	2	Speedy Noil (Jr.)
P	34	Braden Mann (Fr.)	PR	3	Christian Kirk (So.)

Kirk: Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports; Watts: Chris Covatta

TEAM INFORMATION

HEAD COACH
Kevin Sumlin

RECORD AT SCHOOL
36-16 (4 years)

CAREER RECORD
71-33 (8 years)

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR
Noel Mazzone

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR
John Chavis

LOCATION
College Station, TX

STADIUM
Kyle Field (102,733)

KEY AGGIES

CHRISTIAN KIRK One of the nation's top big-play threats at WR and on kick returns; he accounted for nine TDs as a Freshman All-American.

MYLES GARRETT, DE All-American has posted 24 sacks in his first two seasons, and the best appears to be yet to come.

ARMANI WATTS, FS A reliable tackler with excellent coverage skills, he should contend for postseason honors.

AVERY GENNESY, OT The Aggies' best offensive lineman excelled in pass protection at left tackle and figures to be even better as a senior.

JOSH REYNOLDS, WR Has averaged 17 yards per catch and has scored 18 touchdowns in his two-year career at A&M.

KEY LOSSES

MIKE MATTHEWS, C Three-year starter was intelligent, technically sound and the most reliable blocker on the interior line.

DREW KASER, P Punters aren't always appreciated, but Kaser was an All-American and one of the best in school history.

DE'VANTE HARRIS, CB A starter since his freshman year, Harris had his best season as a senior with two interceptions and eight passes broken up.

KYLE ALLEN, QB Was expected to build on two solid seasons, but his surprising decision to transfer left the Aggies in a state of flux at quarterback.

TRA CARSON, RB He wasn't particularly fast, but he was consistent and dependable. Replacing his 1,165 rushing yards won't be easy.

RISING STAR

Big things were expected of highly regarded defensive tackle **Daylon Mack**, and he delivered. As a freshman reserve, Mack posted 9.5 tackles for a loss. Mack hitting running backs at the handoff exchange became quite common. He's expected to make more big plays and be more consistent as a sophomore.

2016 TEXAS A&M ROSTER

QUARTERBACKS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
16	Davidson, Daniel	5-11/172	Jr.	Addison, TX
10	Hubenak, Jake	6-3/215	Jr.	Georgetown, TX
8	Knight, Trevor	6-1/215	Sr.	San Antonio, TX
14	McQueen, Conner	5-10/175	Sr.	Klein, TX
19	Moore, Janson	5-11/200	So.	Henderson, TX

RUNNING BACKS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
29	Bradford, Jay	5-11/196	Fr.	Splendora, TX
25	Bussey, Kendall	5-9/200	Fr.	New Orleans, LA
43	Chavis, Kristian	5-9/225	Fr.	Florence, SC
39	English, Austin	5-11/225	Jr.	Tomball, TX
22	Etwi, Kwame	5-9/195	So.	Conroe, TX
21	Ford, Keith	5-11/215	Jr.	Cypress, TX
26	Rusk, Reggie	5-7/175	So.	Dallas, TX
35	Turner, Tyler	5-8/191	Fr.	Houston, TX
20	White, James	6-0/215	Jr.	Pearland, TX
5	Williams, Trayveon	5-9/190	Fr.	Houston, TX

RECEIVERS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
15	Iheanacho, Frank	6-6/220	So.	Houston, TX
13	Jeffery, Jamal	5-9/180	Jr.	Lufkin, TX
3	Kirk, Christian	5-11/200	So.	Scottsdale, AZ
34	McGee, Trenton	6-0/201	Fr.	Halletsville, TX
42	Motley, Josch	5-11/185	Jr.	College Station, TX
82	Niederhofer, Boone	6-0/207	Sr.	San Antonio, TX
2	Noil, Speedy	5-11/192	Jr.	New Orleans, LA
47	Phillips, Samuel	6-3/204	Fr.	Concord, CA
18	Pope, Edward	6-4/171	Sr.	Carthage, TX
4	Ratley, Damion	6-1/190	Jr.	Yoakum, TX
48	Resendez, Anthony	6-0/200	Fr.	Rockport, TX
11	Reynolds, Josh	6-4/190	Sr.	San Antonio, TX
9	Seals-Jones, Ricky	6-5/249	Jr.	Sealy, TX
16	Siverand, Kemah	6-1/195	Fr.	Cypress, TX
19	Tabuyo, Jeremy	5-11/195	Sr.	Honolulu, HI
83	Whitley, Kyle	6-2/210	So.	Troy, TX

TIGHT ENDS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
49	Bullard, Joshua	6-3/251	So.	Bellville, TX
	Cline, Kalvin	6-4/230	Sr.	Ft. Lauderdale, FL
85	Gustafson, Grant	6-4/235	Fr.	Fort Worth, TX
81	Judkins, Jalyn	6-2/225	Jr.	Angleton, TX
86	Schorp, Tanner	6-3/245	Jr.	San Antonio, TX
87	Shetler, Greer	6-4/215	Fr.	San Antonio, TX

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
67	Beakey, Drew	6-3/290	Fr.	Houston, TX
50	Davis, Tank	6-4/295	So.	Garland, TX
68	Dworaczyk, Justin	6-6/280	Fr.	Houston, TX
71	Elbert, Trevor	6-6/310	Fr.	Rockwall, TX
72	Eluemunor, Jermaine	6-4/320	Sr.	Denville, NJ
65	Gennesy, Avery	6-5/310	Sr.	Southaven, MS
70	Lanfear, Connor	6-6/320	So.	Buda, TX
62	Loitz, Chad	6-1/325	Jr.	Austin, TX
75	Martin, Koda	6-6/300	So.	Manvel, TX
64	McCoy, Erik	6-4/310	Fr.	Lufkin, TX
76	Prater, Colton	6-4/280	Fr.	Bossier City, LA
78	Sutherland, Keaton	6-5/300	So.	Flower Mound, TX
69	Talbert, Brayden	6-5/300	Fr.	Montgomery, TX

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
13	Chevis, Reggie	6-1/290	Jr.	Houston, TX
9	Cunningham, Qualen	6-3/240	Jr.	Chandler, AZ
86	Darley, David	6-4/240	Jr.	Westlake Village, CA
60	Estes, Landry	6-2/245	So.	Trophy Club, TX
59	Flores, Isaac	6-3/300	Sr.	Santa Rosa, TX
15	Garrett, Myles	6-5/262	Jr.	Arlington, TX
10	Hall, Daeshon	6-6/260	Sr.	Seattle, WA
92	Henderson, Zaycoven	6-1/300	Jr.	Longview, TX
53	Huskinson, Ben	6-3/230	Jr.	Houston, TX
40	Johnson, Jarrett	6-3/260	Jr.	Katy, TX
88	Keke, Kingsley	6-3/315	So.	Richmond, TX
59	Knight, Cameron	6-3/253	So.	Shallowater, TX
99	Lockhart, James	6-3/260	So.	Ennis, TX
5	Mack, Daylon	6-1/335	So.	Gladewater, TX
98	Walker, Hardreck	6-2/290	Sr.	Spring, TX

LINEBACKERS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
42	Alaka, Otaro	6-3/240	So.	Houston, TX
37	Buckman, Braden	6-0/200	Fr.	Austin, TX
57	Drummond, Brock	6-0/229	Jr.	Georgetown, TX
48	Durham, Landis	6-3/240	So.	Plano, TX
35	Garner, Riley	6-3/220	So.	College Station, TX
31	George, Claude	6-2/230	Sr.	Lafayette, LA
45	Gillaspia, Cullen	6-2/230	So.	Katy, TX
58	Kirchner, Matthew	6-2/200	Fr.	Plano, TX
50	Labhart, Mac	6-0/225	So.	Dallas, TX
7	Moore, Richard	6-0/210	So.	Cedar Hill, TX
16	Thomas, Dwaine	6-2/230	So.	Boutte, LA
11	Walker, Josh	6-1/240	Jr.	Gilmer, TX
33	Washington, Shaan	6-3/235	Sr.	Alexandria, LA

DEFENSIVE BACKS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
19	Capers-Smith, DeShawn	6-0/190	So.	New Orleans, LA
28	Davis, Victor	6-0/185	Jr.	Rosenberg, TX
30	Dunning, Justin	6-4/225	So.	Whitehouse, TX
27	Elam, Roney	6-2/180	Fr.	Newton, TX
4	Ellis, Noel	5-10/185	Jr.	New Orleans, LA
14	Evans, Justin	6-1/195	Sr.	Wiggins, MS
38	Fadayomi, Anthony	5-10/184	Fr.	Southlake, TX
8	Harvey, Nick	5-10/180	Jr.	Lancaster, TX
41	Howelton, Jardyn	6-0/179	So.	Cypress, TX
32	Paulhill, Will	5-10/192	Sr.	Conroe, TX
18	Pryor, Larry	6-0/205	Fr.	Sulphur Springs, TX
17	Sezer Jr., Alex	5-9/180	Sr.	Orange, TX
23	Watts, Armani	5-11/200	Jr.	Forney, TX
24	Willis, Priest	6-2/200	Jr.	Tempe, AZ
6	Wilson, Donovan	6-1/205	Jr.	Shreveport, LA

SPECIALISTS		HT/WT	CL	HOMETOWN
45	Frey, Austin (LS)	6-1/220	So.	Tomball, TX
41	Grady, Peter (K)	5-11/220	Jr.	Cedar Park, TX
36	LaCamera, Daniel (K/P)	6-4/220	So.	Tarpon Springs, FL
34	Mann, Braden (K)	5-11/215	Fr.	Houston, TX
40	Robertson, Christian (LS)	5-11/245	So.	Grapevine, TX
46	Tripucka, Shane (P)	6-3/215	Jr.	Allen, TX

Scouting the AGGIES

OPPOSING COACHES SIZE UP TEXAS A&M

"I don't know much about their quarterback situation, but obviously they've had turmoil there with all the transfers. Maybe going back to one guy and removing some of the ego from that situation will help from a chemistry standpoint. ... Schematically, they're real simple. They play fast to try to get you off-kilter, but they're simple. They changed coordinators, but they hired the exact same offense in my opinion with Noel Mazzone. He's not overly complicated either. I just don't know if they'll be better at QB. ... Maybe they'll play two backs more with Mazzone; knowing him from when he was at UCLA, he had some split back-type stuff. But at the end of the day, they'll probably do a lot of the same stuff, just with a different guy calling the plays and a new QB. ... Offensive line-wise, we thought they were weak, but in that offense they don't do a whole lot of complicated blocking schemes. They're just not as talented as they were in Kevin Sumlin's first couple years. They don't have a Jake Matthews or Luke Joeckel or some of those linemen they had in the past. I don't know if they missed in recruiting or what. ... They're really good on the defensive line obviously, and a guy to keep an eye on is the Daylon Mack kid. He's a really special talent. Our offense was as worried about him being disruptive as they were about Myles Garrett. Clearly John Chavis had a big impact in the way they played last year, but if they don't figure out the quarterback situation, it'll be tough to beat the better teams in the West."

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: (8-5, 4-4)

Sept.	5	vs. Arizona State %	W	38-17
Sept.	12	Ball State	W	56-23
Sept.	19	Nevada	W	44-27
Sept.	26	vs. Arkansas & (ot)	W	28-21
Oct.	3	Mississippi State	W	30-17
Oct.	17	Alabama	L	23-41
Oct.	24	at Ole Miss	L	3-23
Oct.	31	South Carolina	W	35-28
Nov.	7	Auburn	L	10-26
Nov.	14	Western Carolina	W	41-17
Nov.	21	at Vanderbilt	W	25-0
Nov.	28	at LSU	L	7-19
Dec.	30	vs. Louisville #	L	21-27

%Houston &Arlington #Music City Bowl

ARMANI WATTS

2015 INDIVIDUAL STATS

PASSING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	INT
Kyle Allen	283	160	2,210	17	7
Kyler Murray	121	72	686	5	7

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Tra Carson	242	1,165	4.8	7
Kyler Murray	53	335	6.3	1
James White	**55**	**196**	**3.6**	**1**
Brice Dolezal	38	191	5.0	1

RECEIVING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Christian Kirk	**80**	**1,009**	**12.6**	**7**
Josh Reynolds	**51**	**907**	**17.8**	**5**
Ricky Seals-Jones	**45**	**560**	**12.4**	**4**
Tra Carson	29	183	6.3	1

KICKING: Taylor Bertolet, 22-31 FGs, 38-38 XPs, 104 points

TACKLES: **Armani Watts, 126; Shaan Washington, 81**

SACKS: **Myles Garrett, 12.5**

INTERCEPTIONS: **Donovan Wilson, 5**

Players returning in **Bold**

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	27.8 ppg	7	71
Rushing	169.1 ypg	8	66
Passing	255.6 ypg	4	39
Total	424.7 ypg	6	50

DEFENSE	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
Scoring	22.0 ppg	7	28
Rushing	213.7 ypg	13	108
Passing	166.3 ypg	2	4
Total	380.0 ypg	8	51

TO MARGIN	PER GAME	SEC	NATIONAL
-6	-0.46	13	102

JOSH REYNOLDS

at defensive tackle, where sophomores Daylon Mack and Kingsley Keke step into starting roles. Mack demonstrated the ability to make spectacular tackles in the backfield, but he has a tendency to run himself out of plays and needs to show more consistency. Keke made steady progress in his freshman year and then received raves from coaches for continued development in the offseason. A breakout year is anticipated. Junior Zaycoven Henderson gives A&M a stout three-man rotation in the interior.

LINEBACKERS Suspensions and injuries have made linebacker a major problem area since 2013, causing extreme futility against the run. Yet, there is cautious optimism that the Aggies can offer more than turnstile-like resistance in run defense. Otaro Alaka is back after missing almost all of the 2015 season with shoulder and elbow injuries. Alaka is fast, big and smart. He played well in the second half of his true freshman season in 2014 and was named Defensive MVP of the Liberty Bowl. His presence on the strong side will be an upgrade. The development of sophomore Richard Moore is another plus. He started the last third of the 2015 season and emerged as the Aggies' best linebacker. He projects to be better with a year's experience and some additional weight. There remains a big hole in the middle that oft-injured junior Josh Walker could fill if he can finally remain healthy. If not, senior and former junior college transfer Claude George, sophomore Riley Garner or even true freshman Tyrel Dodson will get a shot.

DEFENSIVE BACKS The safety positions are set with junior Armani Watts and senior Justin Evans. They're as good as any tandem in the SEC. Also, Donovan Wilson, who led the team with five interceptions, excels in his role as nickel back. There is more uncertainty at corner, where both starters must be replaced. Former four-star recruit Priest Willis, who sat out last season after transferring from UCLA, will take over on one side. Nick Harvey, a backup last year, figures to start on the other side. Also, Evans could move to corner if needed.

SPECIALISTS The Aggies are breaking in a new kicker and punter to replace All-SEC selections Taylor Bertolet and Drew Kaser. Sophomore kicker Daniel LaCamera has yet to attempt a field goal. Shane Tripuka punted twice last year, and Braden Mann is a true freshman. There are no such concerns on kick returns. Kirk and Noil both are big-play threats with All-SEC credentials.

ADVANCED STATS

5 FACTORS: COLLEGE FOOTBALL'S MOST IMPORTANT STATS

FIELD POSITION[1]		RANK
OFFENSE	30.3	56
DEFENSE	28.0	30
MARGIN	+2.3	44
EFFICIENCY[2]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	43.0%	47
DEFENSE	38.7%	40
MARGIN	+4.3%	38
EXPLOSIVENESS[3]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	5.6	69
DEFENSE	5.4	51
MARGIN	+0.2	60
FINISHING DRIVES[4]		**RANK**
OFFENSE	4.1	100
DEFENSE	3.6	14
MARGIN	+0.5	45
ADJUSTED T.O. MARGIN[5]		**RANK**
PROJECTED	-5.2	103
ACTUAL	-6	102
MARGIN	-0.8	84

NUMBERS TO KNOW

KEY: 1-Average starting field position by yard line; **2**-Rate of successful plays (gaining 50% of necessary yards on 1st down, 70% on 2nd down, 100% on 3rd down); **3**-Explosiveness=yards per play; **4**-Points per trip inside 40-yard line; **5**-TO margin accounting for "luck" Advanced stats provided by Bill Connelly of SB Nation

1.15 In 2014, Texas A&M averaged 5.2 points per scoring opportunity (first downs inside the opponent's 40), fourth in FBS. In 2015, the Aggies' average fell by 1.15 points all the way to 4.05 (100th), the third-largest regression in the country. Red zone execution was lacking, as were big plays — the Aggies managed just 26 gains of 30-plus yards, down from 34 the year before.

15.6 Though A&M's offensive line was not the dominant force it used to be, the Aggies still did a pretty good job of keeping opponents out of the backfield. They allowed run stops at or behind the line on only 15.6 percent of carries (11th in FBS), and Aggie rushes gained at least five yards 43.5 percent of the time (19th). The problem was explosiveness: Only 17 of those carries gained at least 20 yards (75th in FBS), and only five gained at least 30 (101st).

111 Though Texas A&M's defense still has work to do when it comes to stopping the run, the Aggies were unquestionably more aggressive and effective in 2015. They led the SEC with 111 tackles for a loss. Seven players had more than six TFLs, and all seven are scheduled to return to College Station this fall.

0.389 After joining the SEC in 2012, Texas A&M won 10 of its first 14 conference games. That's a healthy 0.714 win percentage. Since then, however, they have won just seven of 18, a 0.389 win percentage. There's considerable pressure on Kevin Sumlin to reverse this trend in 2015.

Harrison McClary/Athlon Sports

2016 SIGNEES

BY POSITION	
Offensive Linemen	5
Defensive Backs	4
Wide Receivers	3
Running Backs	2
Linebackers	2
Defensive Linemen	2
Quarterbacks	1
Athletes	1
Kickers	1
BY STATE	
Texas	15
Louisiana	3
Tennessee	2
District of Columbia	1

A series of de-commitments and near-misses resulted in Texas A&M's lowest-rated recruiting class of coach Kevin Sumlin's tenure, but with some late January commitments and flips, the Aggies managed to rally and work their way into the national top 20.

A&M was able to wrest Washington, D.C., linebacker Aaron Hansford away from UCLA on National Signing Day and coaxed New Orleans defensive back Clifford Chattman away from Florida State the night before. Hansford indicated that he did not make his decision until walking to the high school auditorium for his signing ceremony.

The Aggies also managed to flip four-star offensive tackle Kellen Diesch from Arkansas and quarterback Nick Starkel from Oklahoma State. Sumlin had not planned on recruiting a quarterback, but when Kyle Allen and Kyler Murray announced their plans to transfer in December, quarterback suddenly became a position in dire need of depth.

Diesch was the headliner in a solid haul of five offensive linemen that also included twin brothers Austin and Riley Anderson from Mineola, Texas. The Aggies also addressed a major need at running back with Houston prospects Trayveon Williams and Rakeem Boyd, and — as usual — A&M appeared to hit it big at receiver with four-star prospects Quartney Davis and Clyde Chriss.

Defensively, A&M addressed needs at linebacker with Hansford, Chattman and Tyrel Dodson, a four-star rated prospect from Franklin, Tenn.

However, the Aggies came up short on some targets in the secondary and were extremely disappointed by the failure to land a defensive tackle. Four-star rated defensive end Justin Madubuike could develop into a tackle if necessary, but the only other defensive lineman in A&M's 21-player class is end Alton Robinson, whose career may be in question because of a legal issue.

Overall, A&M's 2016 class has been called low maintenance. That would be a welcome description considering the bad luck that the Aggies have has had with some recent elite prospects.

SPOTLIGHT ON

TYREL DODSON

LB • FRANKLIN, TN

The state of Texas is well known as a fertile football recruiting ground, so it takes something special for Texas A&M to look elsewhere. The Aggies believe they found something special in Tennessee.

Defensive coordinator John Chavis went back to his old stomping grounds to lure four-star linebacker Tyrel Dodson away from several other Southeastern Conference suitors, including Alabama.

"They (A&M coaches) told me to expect some playing time," the 6'2", 235-pound Dodson said. "I could possibly start as a true freshman or play special teams. My mentality is: 'Coach, wherever you need me at, that's where I'm going to play.' The team excels the most when you have unselfish players."

Dodson very well could find his way into the starting lineup as a true freshman as recurring injuries forced 2015 starting middle linebacker A.J. Hilliard to quit football. Further, the Aggies have had at least one true freshman starting linebacker in each of the past three seasons.

A&M will need its best linebackers on the field to bolster a run defense that has been among the nation's most futile the past three seasons. That's especially crucial when facing running backs such as Tennessee's Jalen Hurd and LSU's Leonard Fournette.

"Jalen Hurd was a big, big player in Tennessee not too long ago," Dodson says. "Leonard Fournette ... he is one of the best running backs in the country. It's crazy that I will be able — or get the opportunity — to hit him next year."

NAME	Pos	Ht/Wt	Hometown	247	ESPN	Rivals	Scout	Nat. Rank
Austin Anderson	OT	6-4/292	Mineola, TX	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	406
Riley Anderson	OT	6-5/295	Mineola, TX	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	584
Rakeem Boyd	RB	6-0/200	Houston, TX	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	447
Clifford Chattman	DB	6-5/180	New Orleans, LA	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	642
Clyde Chriss	WR	6-0/175	New Orleans, LA	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	199
Quartney Davis	WR	6-2/181	Houston, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	128
Kellen Diesch	OT	6-7/283	Trophy Club, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	105
Tyrel Dodson	ILB	6-2/235	Franklin, TN	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	402
Travon Fuller	CB	6-0/170	Athens, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	239
Aaron Hansford	LB	6-2/210	Washington, DC	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	143
Justin Madubuike	DE	6-3/245	McKinney, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	56
Braden Mann	K	5-11/185	Houston, TX	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,188
Ryan McCollum	OT	6-5/275	Spring, TX	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	1,361
Ikenna Okeke	S	6-3/200	Smyrna, TN	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	438
Charles Oliver	CB	6-2/185	Fairfield, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	268
Colton Prater	OG	6-5/280	Bossier City, LA	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★	1,122
Moses Reynolds	ATH	6-2/180	San Antonio, TX	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	575
Alton Robinson	DE	6-3/228	Converse, TX	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	467
Kendrick Rogers	WR	6-4/185	Frankston, TX	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	456
Nick Starkel	QB	6-3/185	Argyle, TX	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★	526
Trayveon Williams	RB	5-9/179	Houston, TX	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	309

AMERICAN PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

EAST

1. USF BULLS — 9-4, 6-2 AMERICAN
2. TEMPLE OWLS — 8-4, 5-3 AMERICAN
3. CINCINNATI BEARCATS — 8-4, 5-3 AMERICAN
4. CONNECTICUT HUSKIES — 6-6, 4-4 AMERICAN
5. EAST CAROLINA PIRATES — 4-8, 3-5 AMERICAN
6. UCF KNIGHTS — 3-9, 1-7 AMERICAN

WEST

1. HOUSTON COUGARS — 11-2, 8-0 AMERICAN
2. NAVY MIDSHIPMEN — 8-4, 6-2 AMERICAN
3. MEMPHIS TIGERS — 7-5, 4-4 AMERICAN
4. TULSA GOLDEN HURRICANE — 7-5, 4-4 AMERICAN
5. SMU MUSTANGS — 4-8, 2-6 AMERICAN
6. TULANE GREEN WAVE — 2-10, 0-8 AMERICAN

American Athletic Conference Championship: Houston over USF

GREG WARD

2016 UNIT RANKINGS

	QB	RB	WR/TE	OL	DL	LB	DB
CINCINNATI	3	3	9	4	9	9	7
CONNECTICUT	9	8	10	9	3	4	1
EAST CAROLINA	10	9	1	7	6	8	3
HOUSTON	1	5	2	1	1	1	5
MEMPHIS	11	4	5	2	5	7	6
NAVY	8	11	11	8	7	6	9
SMU	7	10	6	11	12	12	12
TEMPLE	5	2	8	3	2	5	4
TULANE	12	7	12	12	8	11	10
TULSA	4	6	3	6	10	3	11
UCF	6	12	4	10	11	10	8
USF	2	1	7	5	4	2	2

2015 BOWL RESULTS

PEACH BOWL: HOUSTON 38, FLORIDA STATE 24

BOCA RATON BOWL: TOLEDO 32, TEMPLE 17

MIAMI BEACH BOWL: WKU 45, USF 35

HAWAII BOWL: SAN DIEGO STATE 42, CINCINNATI 7

ST. PETERSBURG BOWL: MARSHALL 16, CONNECTICUT 10

BIRMINGHAM BOWL: AUBURN 31, MEMPHIS 10

INDEPENDENCE BOWL: VIRGINIA TECH 55, TULSA 52

MILITARY BOWL: NAVY 44, PITTSBURGH 28

PRESEASON ALL-AAC TEAMS

First-Team Offense

QB	Greg Ward	5-11	185	Sr.	Houston
RB	Marlon Mack	6-0	205	Jr.	USF
RB	Jahad Thomas	5-10	188	Sr.	Temple
WR	Courtland Sutton	6-4	215	So.	SMU
WR	Isaiah Jones	6-1	197	Sr.	East Carolina
WR	Keevan Lucas	5-10	195	Sr.	Tulsa
C	Deyshawn Bond	6-1	291	Sr.	Cincinnati
OL	Dion Dawkins	6-5	320	Sr.	Temple
OL	Ryan Leahy	6-6	292	Sr.	Cincinnati
OL	J.T. Boyd	6-4	298	Sr.	East Carolina
OL	Kofi Amichia	6-4	290	Sr.	USF
AP	Arkeel Newsome	6-7	180	Jr.	UConn

First-Team Defense

DL	Tanzel Smart	6-1	304	Sr.	Tulane
DL	B.J. Singleton	6-4	314	Sr.	Houston
DL	Folorunso Fatukasi	6-4	310	Jr.	UConn
DL	Haason Reddick	6-1	230	Sr.	Temple
LB	Steven Taylor	6-1	225	Sr.	Houston
LB	Nico Marley	5-10	208	Sr.	Tulane
LB	Auggie Sanchez	6-2	244	Jr.	USF
CB	Jamar Summers	6-0	185	Jr.	UConn
CB	Sean Chandler	6-0	190	Jr.	Temple
S	Zach Edwards	6-1	200	Sr.	Cincinnati
S	Obi Melifonwu	6-3	216	Sr.	UConn

First-Team Specialists

K	Jake Elliott	5-10	165	Sr.	Memphis
P	Caleb Houston	6-1	210	Sr.	UCF
KR	Brandon Wilson	5-11	200	Sr.	Houston
PR	Tajee Fulwood	6-2	203	Jr.	USF

Second-Team Offense

QB	Quinton Flowers	6-0	210	Jr.	USF
RB	Duke Catalon	6-0	210	So.	Houston
RB	Dontrel Hilliard	5-11	195	Jr.	Tulane
WR	Chance Allen	6-3	215	Sr.	Houston
WR	Rodney Adams	6-1	190	Sr.	USF
WR	Tre'Quan Smith	6-1	201	So.	UCF
C	Will Noble	6-4	290	So.	Houston
OL	Dominique Threatt	6-1	315	Sr.	USF
OL	Chris Taylor	6-3	320	Sr.	Tulane
OL	Blake Belcher	6-5	304	Sr.	Tulsa
OL	Trevon Tate	6-4	280	So.	Memphis
AP	Sam Craft	6-0	210	Sr.	Memphis

Second-Team Defense

DL	Jamiyus Pittman	6-0	300	Jr.	UCF
DL	Deadrin Senat	6-1	305	Jr.	USF
DL	Praise Martin-Oguike	6-1	255	Sr.	Temple
DL	Luke Carrezola	6-3	260	Jr.	UConn
LB	Matt Linscott	6-1	223	Sr.	Tulsa
LB	Eric Wilson	6-2	219	Sr.	Cincinnati
LB	Junior Joseph	6-1	242	Jr.	UConn
CB	Deatrick Nichols	5-10	189	Jr.	USF
CB	Brandon Wilson	5-11	200	Sr.	Houston
S	Travon Simmons	5-10	185	Jr.	East Carolina
S	Nate Godwin	5-10	204	Sr.	USF

Second-Team Specialists

K	Andrew Gantz	5-9	170	Jr.	Cincinnati
P	Worth Gregory	6-3	209	Sr.	East Carolina
WR	Rodney Adams	6-1	190	Sr.	USF
PR	Quay Johnson	5-10	177	Jr.	East Carolina

Houston Athletics

MEMPHIS TIGERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 83 • AAC WEST PREDICTION: 3 • PROJECTED RECORD: 7-5, 4-4 AAC

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Mike Norvell
Record at School: First Season
Career Record: First Season
Offensive Coordinator: Chip Long
Defensive Coordinator: Chris Ball
Memphis, TN • Liberty Bowl (59,308)

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	3	SE Missouri State
Sept.	17	Kansas
Sept.	24	Bowling Green
Oct.	1	at Ole Miss
Oct.	6	Temple
Oct.	14	at Tulane
Oct.	22	at Navy
Oct.	29	Tulsa
Nov.	5	at SMU
Nov.	12	South Florida
Nov.	18	at Cincinnati
Nov.	25	Houston

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: 9-4, 5-3

Sept.	5	Missouri State	W	63-7
Sept.	12	at Kansas	W	55-23
Sept.	19	at Bowling Green	W	44-41
Sept.	24	Cincinnati	W	53-46
Oct.	2	at South Florida	W	24-17
Oct.	17	Ole Miss	W	37-24
Oct.	23	at Tulsa	W	66-42
Oct.	31	Tulane	W	41-13
Nov.	7	Navy	L	20-45
Nov.	14	at Houston	L	34-35
Nov.	21	at Temple	L	12-31
Nov.	28	SMU	W	63-0
Dec.	30	vs. Auburn #	L	10-31

#Birmingham Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS

1. Riley Ferguson, QB, Matthews, NC*
2. Lio Lafaele, OL, Corona, CA*
3. John Tate, DE, Pine Bluff, AR
4. Tim Hart, LB, Memphis, TN
5. Joshua Perry, DB, Amite, LA
6. David Moore, QB, Alpharetta, GA
7. Nehemiah Augustus, DB, Patterson, LA
8. Pop Williams, WR, Destrehan, LA
9. Tyrez Lindsey, DB, Dothan, AL
10. Thomas Pickens, DB, Memphis, TN

*junior college transfer

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	AAC	NATIONAL
Scoring	40.2 ppg	2	11
Rushing	179.5 ypg	4	55
Passing	307.5 ypg	3	18
Total	486.9 ypg	3	19
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**AAC**	**NATIONAL**
Scoring	27.3 ppg	7	67
Rushing	146.5 ypg	5	38
Passing	260.2 ypg	9	106
Total	406.7 ypg	7	77
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**AAC**	**NATIONAL**
+8	+0.62	5	23

OFFENSE First-year head coach Mike Norvell, who replaces Justin Fuente, assumes the reins of a team that must replace its record-setting quarterback. NFL Draft pick Paxton Lynch passed for a school-record 3,776 yards and 28 touchdowns as a junior, then announced his departure about a month after Fuente announced his for Virginia Tech.

Norvell quickly targeted ex-Tennessee quarterback Riley Ferguson, a 6'4" transfer from Coffeyville Community College, during recruiting. Ferguson is smaller than Lynch, but he possesses impressive credentials. Ferguson, redshirt freshman Brady Davis and senior Jason Stewart shared snaps with the No. 1 offense in the spring.

Whoever emerges may be able to ease into the role. The Tigers will rely heavily on a running game that returns its top four backs: Doroland Dorceus, Jarvis Cooper, Sam Craft and Jamarius Henderson. Expect new offensive coordinator Chip Long to utilize two-back sets to accentuate that depth.

Craft, a multi-purpose talent, once again could line up in the backfield or at receiver. He will be joined in that role by sophomore Tony Pollard, who had an impressive spring and is Craft's likely successor. The receiving corps lost top wideout Mose Frazier, but Anthony Miller, Roderick Proctor and Phil Mayhue are reliable playmakers. Miller is the top big-play threat.

New offensive line coach Ryan Silverfield has multiple returnees, but they may end up at different spots. Former right tackle Trevon Tate, perhaps the group's best lineman, is a strong candidate to move to left tackle.

DEFENSE Coordinator Chris Ball, yet another assistant joining Norvell from Arizona State, has several returnees to anchor the defense. Veterans Latarius Brady and Ernest Suttles return to anchor the ends with Donald Pennington at tackle, backed by emerging playmaker Jared Gentry, a deceptively quick inside presence at 325 pounds.

At linebacker Jackson Dillon, a punishing tackler, is another familiar face. He had six tackles for a loss and a team-best two fumble recoveries last year. Also returning at linebacker is Genard Avery, a junior who briefly considered transferring to his home-state school, Ole Miss, before spring practice. High school teammate Shareef White will line up alongside Avery and may be the most athletic at the position.

The Tigers lost their most productive member of the secondary, safety Reggis Ball, but newcomer Jonathan Cook may fill the void. Cook began his career at Alabama, where he played two seasons before transferring to junior college. He was a playmaker in spring scrimmages. Cornerbacks Arthur Maulet and Dontrell Nelson each had two picks last season.

SPECIALISTS There may not be a better kicking game in the conference. Placekicker Jake Elliott is back for his senior season after twice being named the league's Special Teams Player of the Year. Elliott led the nation's kickers in scoring last season with 132 points and made 23-of-28 field goals. Punter Spencer Smith returns after averaging 47.2 yards. The Tigers have gone 20 years without returning a kickoff for a touchdown.

FINAL ANALYSIS Fuente went 19–7 his final two seasons — the school's best two-year mark in a decade — before handing off to Norvell, who will be making his debut as a head coach. He won't be the only newcomer — neither Ferguson nor Davis, the top two candidates in the QB derby, has taken a snap at the FBS level. That creates a challenge trying to match last year's win total. Fuente had the Tigers in the New Year's Six Bowls discussion at midseason as they made a rare appearance in the top 20. There isn't likely to be the same buzz around Liberty Bowl Memorial Stadium this fall, but another winning season is likely.

DOROLAND DORCEUS

"I think they'll have to adjust to the new scheme, but they have enough talent to compete with anybody in the league."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	3	Anthony Miller (Jr.)	19	Jae'Lon Oglesby (So.)
WR	89	**Phil Mayhue (Jr.)**	18	Roderick Proctor (Jr.)
WR	11	Sam Craft (Sr.)	22	Tony Pollard (So.)
LT	72	**Trevon Tate (So.)**	78	Nick Thomas (So.)
LG	64	Zach Collins (So.)	65	**Christopher Roberson (Sr.)**
C	54	**Drew Kyser (So.)**	60	Cooper Williams (So.)
RG	50	Lio Lafaele (Jr.)	73	Keenan Davis (So.)
RT	71	**Gabe Kuhn (Jr.)**	51	Jace Neville (So.)
TE	80	Daniel Montiel (Sr.)	84	Robby Young (Jr.)
QB	4	Riley Ferguson (Jr.)	7	Brady Davis (Fr.)
RB	28	**Doroland Dorceus (Jr.)**	26	Jamarius Henderson (So.)

DEFENSE (8)

DE	5	Latarius Brady (Sr.)	15	**Christian Johnson (Jr.)**
DT	58	**Donald Pennington (Sr.)**	98	Jared Gentry (So.)
DE	48	Ernest Suttles (Jr.)	97	Emmanuel Cooper (So.)
LB	6	**Genard Avery (Jr.)**	45	Noah Robinson (Jr.)
LB	30	Shareef White (Jr.)	29	Darian Porter (Jr.)
LB	34	**Jackson Dillon (Sr.)**	13	DeMarco Montgomery (Sr.)
SPUR	42	Shaun Rupert (Jr.)	25	Austin Hall (So.)
CB	8	**Arthur Maulet (Sr.)**	12	**Chauncey Lanier (Sr.)**
CB	10	**Dontrell Nelson (Sr.)**	23	B.J. Ross (Sr.)
SS	17	**Chris Morley (Sr.)**	31	Anthony Young (Jr.)
FS	14	Jonathan Cook (Jr.)	2	Ty Northern (Jr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	46	Jake Elliott (Sr.)	KR	19 Jae'Lon Oglesby (So.)
P	36	Spencer Smith (Jr.)	PR	18 Roderick Proctor (Jr.)

BOLD indicates returning starter

RETURNING LEADERS

Passing: Clay Holgorsen, 20-14-177-1, 1 TDs
Rushing: Doroland Dorceus, 155 att., 661 yds., 8 TDs
Receiving: Phil Mayhue, 51 rec., 670 yds., 1 TD
Tackles: Shareef White, 63
Sacks: Christian Johnson, 4.0
Interceptions: Arthur Maulet, 2; Dontrell Nelson, 2

STAT CORNER

2

Memphis spent four weeks ranked in the AP top 25 in 2015. The Tigers had been ranked for a grand total of two weeks before last fall.

Joe Murphy

TULANE GREEN WAVE

NATIONAL FORECAST: 117 • AAC WEST PREDICTION: 6 • PROJECTED RECORD: 2-10, 0-8 AAC

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Willie Fritz
Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 154–69 (19 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Doug Ruse
Defensive Coordinator: Jack Curtis
New Orleans, LA • Yulman Stadium (30,000)

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	1	at Wake Forest
Sept.	10	Southern
Sept.	17	Navy
Sept.	24	UL Lafayette
Oct.	1	vs. Massachusetts #
Oct.	7	at UCF
Oct.	14	Memphis
Oct.	22	at Tulsa
Oct.	29	SMU
Nov.	12	at Houston
Nov.	19	Temple
Nov.	26	at Connecticut

#Foxboro, MA

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: 3-9, 1-7

Sept.	3	Duke	L	7-37
Sept.	12	at Georgia Tech	L	10-65
Sept.	19	Maine	W	38-7
Oct.	3	UCF	W	45-31
Oct.	10	at Temple	L	10-49
Oct.	16	Houston	L	7-42
Oct.	24	at Navy	L	14-31
Oct.	31	at Memphis	L	13-41
Nov.	7	Connecticut	L	3-7
Nov.	14	at Army	W	34-31
Nov.	21	at SMU	L	21-49
Nov.	27	Tulsa	L	34-45

TOP 10 RECRUITS

1. P.J. Hall, CB, Hoover, AL
2. Tre Jackson, DB, Baton Rouge, LA
3. Jacob Robertson, WR, College Park, GA
4. De'Andre Williams, DT, Baton Rouge, LA
5. Deion Rainey, DE, Baton Rouge, LA
6. Will Harper, DB, Memphis, TN
7. A.J. Walker, RB, Pinson, AL
8. Darnell Mooney, WR, Gadsden, AL
9. D.J. Owens, RB, Acworth, GA
10. Eric Lewis, DB, LaPlace, LA

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	AAC	NATIONAL
Scoring	19.7 ppg	10	113
Rushing	115.8 ypg	11	119
Passing	201.3 ypg	8	90
Total	317.0 ypg	10	120
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**AAC**	**NATIONAL**
Scoring	36.3 ppg	9	110
Rushing	178.8 ypg	8	74
Passing	233.4 ypg	6	74
Total	412.3 ypg	9	80
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**AAC**	**NATIONAL**
+1	+0.08	8	58

OFFENSE First, the good news. Coach Willie Fritz fielded the nation's No. 1 rushing team in both of his seasons at Georgia Southern, and he inherited a deep, talented group of running backs when he arrived at Tulane in December. Junior Dontrell Hilliard is capable of a 1,000-yard season if he gets enough carries. Big-play specialist Sherman Badie, the physical Lazedrick Thompson and Josh Rounds are capable of making an impact as well.

The question is what the Green Wave will do at every other position. Two-year starting quarterback Tanner Lee transferred to Nebraska because he did not think he would be a good fit for Fritz' system, which would have required him to run often. Untested sophomore Glen Cuiellette competed with true freshman early enrollee Darius Bradwell in the spring, but both of them struggled mightily as passers.

Tulane is thin at wide receiver. Teddy Veal (48 receptions) transferred to Louisiana Tech and Devon Breaux (25) gave up football to concentrate on track and field. Sophomore Terren Encalade, converted tight end Trey Scott and former walk-on Larry Dace were the top targets in the spring.

The most important man on Fritz' staff may be offensive line coach Alex Atkins. He needs to coax better play from a unit that was abysmal throughout former coach Curtis Johnson's tenure. Atkins will rely heavily on guard Chris Taylor, a third-year starter who has been inconsistent, and center Junior Diaz, who became a starter late last year.

DEFENSE The starting point is higher on defense, particularly up front, where Tulane held Navy's triple-option attack to its lowest rushing total of 2015. Senior Tanzel Smart made 62 tackles with 15 for a loss — both astronomical totals for an interior lineman — on his way to first-team All-American Athletic Conference honors. Raw but talented end Ade Aruna learned on the job a year ago and should be much improved. Tackles Sean Wilson and Eldrick Washington give the Green Wave depth in the middle.

Senior linebacker Nico Marley, another first-team All-AAC selection, has 232 career tackles despite being listed generously at 5'10", 208 pounds. Fritz has embraced his unconventional style, saying Marley has a knack for making plays. The coaches also like the effort of senior Eric Thomas.

Pass defense was a trouble spot last year and could be again with the graduation of four-year starting safety Darion Monroe. Jarrod Franklin moved to safety from nickel back in the spring. Cornerback Parry Nickerson struggled as a sophomore after a tremendous redshirt freshman season (six interceptions, 12 passes defensed). The return of safety Leonard Davis from a yearlong suspension could help.

SPECIALISTS The Green Wave could improve their win total just by eliminating the kicking debacles that have plagued them of late. Sophomore punter Zachary Block will look to improve his 37.9-yard average. Placekicker Andrew DiRocco bounced back from a rough freshman year to make 9-of-10 field goals, but his range is only about 40 yards. Improving the return game is a priority. Tulane ranked 115th in kickoff returns with a long of 36 and had no punt return of more than 15 yards.

FINAL ANALYSIS Fritz has won right away everywhere he has coached but faces his biggest challenge. The defense has potential, but Tulane has no experience at quarterback, no proven production on the offensive line and a questionable receiving corps. Look for a ground-based approach that tries to take advantage of the talented running backs while the quarterbacks make plays with their feet rather than their arms. At least the non-conference schedule is favorable, with Wake Forest and Massachusetts replacing Duke and Georgia Tech.

NICO MARLEY

"They'll be rolling it like Georgia Southern, which is Navy with a Pistol look to it, so it's a little different."

— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (4)

WR	5	Terren Encalade (Jr.)	85	Larry Dace (Sr.)
WR	83	Trey Scott (Jr.)	15	Rickey Preston (So.)
LT	78	**Todd Jacquet (Sr.)**	74	Devon Johnson (So.)
LG	75	**Chris Taylor (Sr.)**	73	Leeward Brown (So.)
C	51	Junior Diaz (So.)	53	Keyshawn McLeod (Fr.)
RG	79	Kenneth Santa Marina (Jr.)	71	Jason Stewart (Jr.)
RT	72	John Leglue (So.)	70	Keeyon Smart (Fr.)
TE	84	Charles Jones (Jr.)	**89**	**Kendall Ardoin (So.)**
QB	2	Darius Bradwell (Fr.)	14	Glen Cuiellette (So.)
RB	7	Devin Glenn (So.)	25	Josh Rounds (Sr.)
RB	26	**Dontrell Hilliard (Jr.)**	3	Sherman Badie (Jr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	54	Quinlan Carroll (Jr.)	90	Robert Kennedy (So.)
DT	94	Sean Wilson (Jr.)	91	Eldrick Washington (Jr.)
DT	77	**Tanzel Smart (Sr.)**	65	Braynon Edwards (So.)
DE	87	**Ade Aruna (Jr.)**	57	Peter Woullard (So.)
LB	20	**Nico Marley (Sr.)**	40	Zachery Harris (Jr.)
LB	52	**Eric Thomas (Sr.)**	56	Rae Juan Marbley (Jr.)
NB	23	Richard Allen (Sr.)	19	Taris Shenall (So.)
CB	21	**Donnie Lewis (So.)**	11	Dedrick Shy (So.)
CB	17	**Parry Nickerson (Jr.)**	23	Richard Allen (Sr.)
SS	6	**Jarrod Franklin (Jr.)**	4	Will Harper (Fr.)
FS	10	Leonard Davis (Sr.)	38	Roderic Teamer (So.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	42	Andrew DiRocco (Jr.)	KR	26	Dontrell Hilliard (Jr.)
P	49	Zachary Block (So.)	PR	17	Parry Nickerson (Jr.)

BOLD indicates returning starter

RETURNING LEADERS

Passing: Devin Powell, 36-16-157-0, 1 TD
Rushing: Dontrell Hilliard, 115 att., 646 yds., 6 TDs
Receiving: Sherman Badie, 27 rec., 284 yds., 0 TD
Tackles: Nico Marley, 82
Sacks: Ade Aruna, 3.0
Interceptions: Five players tied with 1

STAT CORNER

.691

Willie Fritz's win percentage over 19 years as a head coach is 0.691. Tulane's win percentage over that same span: 0.376.

Tulane Athletics

UCF KNIGHTS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 100 • **AAC EAST PREDICTION:** 6 • **PROJECTED RECORD:** 3-9, 1-7 AAC

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Scott Frost
Record at School: First Season
Career Record: First Season
Offensive Coordinator: Troy Walters
Defensive Coordinator: Erik Chinander
Orlando, FL
Bright House Networks Stadium (44,206)

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	3	South Carolina St.
Sept.	10	at Michigan
Sept.	17	Maryland
Sept.	24	at FIU
Oct.	1	at East Carolina
Oct.	7	Tulane
Oct.	15	Temple
Oct.	22	at Connecticut
Oct.	29	at Houston
Nov.	12	Cincinnati
Nov.	19	Tulsa
Nov.	26	at South Florida

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: 0-12, 0-8

Sept.	3	FIU	L	14-15
Sept.	12	at Stanford	L	7-31
Sept.	19	Furman	L	15-16
Sept.	26	at South Carolina	L	14-31
Oct.	3	at Tulane	L	31-45
Oct.	10	Connecticut	L	13-40
Oct.	17	at Temple	L	16-30
Oct.	24	Houston	L	10-59
Oct.	31	at Cincinnati	L	7-52
Nov.	7	at Tulsa	L	30-45
Nov.	19	East Carolina	L	7-44
Nov.	26	South Florida	L	3-44

TOP 10 RECRUITS

1. Dredrick Snelson, WR, Miami, FL
2. Aaron Dowdell, OL, Atlanta, GA
3. Jordan Johnson, OL, Jacksonville, FL
4. D.J. Davidson, DT, Mesa, AZ
5. Eric Mitchell, LB, Miami, FL
6. Adrian Killins, RB, Daytona Beach, FL
7. Dedrion Bacote, DE, Virginia Beach, FL
8. Dontay Mayfield, WR, Homestead, FL
9. Jawon Hamilton, RB, Homestead, FL
10. McKenzie Milton, QB, Kapolei, HI

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	AAC	NATIONAL
Scoring	13.9 ppg	12	126
Rushing	81.3 ypg	12	127
Passing	187.2 ypg	10	102
Total	268.4 ypg	12	128
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**AAC**	**NATIONAL**
Scoring	37.7 ppg	10	118
Rushing	199.2 ypg	10	100
Passing	264.9 ypg	10	110
Total	464.1 ypg	10	114
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**AAC**	**NATIONAL**
-20	-1.67	12	127

OFFENSE Change is in the air at UCF with the arrival of head coach Scott Frost, the former Oregon offensive coordinator who is bringing the Ducks' prolific offense down to Florida. The days of George O'Leary's pro-style, ball-control offense are over. Now it's a fast-paced, no-huddle spread. Frost inherits a team that was winless last season, but he's not devoid of talent with experienced players at virtually every offensive position. Injuries were a key reason for the struggles of 2015, not the least of them quarterback Justin Holman's broken finger that limited him for much of the year.

Holman, a senior who helped lead the Knights to the 2014 conference title, appears to be adapting well to the new scheme, and he does have skilled athletes around him. Sophomore wide receiver Tre'Quan Smith is a star in the making after a rookie season in which he led the team in both receptions (52) and receiving yards (724). There's promising youth at running back, notably sophomore Taj McGowan, plus a pair of incoming recruits who possess elite speed.

Tight ends could be a bigger focal point in the passing game, and there's no shortage of experience there with Jordan Akins and Jordan Franks both making the transition from wide receiver.

The biggest question is whether the offensive line — an underperforming unit last year — can adapt to the new style.

DEFENSE The changes are nearly as dramatic on defense with UCF moving to a 3-4 scheme coordinated by Erik Chinander, who came with Frost from Oregon and also spent time with Chip Kelly and the Philadelphia Eagles. Chinander has experience to work with in the secondary, which should be the strength of the team as seniors could very well start at all four of the back-end positions. Safety Drico Johnson is a steady presence as the team's leading returning tackler.

The front seven has more questions. Defensive tackle Jamiyus Pittman is a solid player, having led the team in sacks last season, but he needs help, which is why defensive line was such a big focus in recruiting with three junior college additions.

The 3-4 alignment may turn out to be a net positive for the existing talent base, since UCF does have a bit more depth at linebacker. Junior outside linebacker Chequan Burkett is the leader of the group and is an all-conference candidate.

SPECIALISTS Through all the woes of last season, the kicking game was reliable, and everybody is back. Caleb Houston posted the second-best punting mark in school history with a 44.2-yard average, while kicker Matthew Wright was dependable in his freshman debut, making 13-of-17 field goals and every one of his extra-point attempts. Tristan Payton was explosive as a kick returner, but don't be surprised if true freshman speedsters Adrian Killins, Jaquarius Bargnare and Jawon Hamilton also get a look there this fall.

FINAL ANALYSIS UCF averaged 9.4 victories from 2010-14, won the Fiesta Bowl in 2013 and was coming off back-to-back conference championships, which is why last year's 0–12 season came as such a shock. Despite the record, there was always a sense UCF wasn't a typical winless team; youth, injuries and coaching turmoil — O'Leary resigned midway through the season — all contributed to the downfall. Frost has tools at his disposal — an experienced quarterback in Holman capable of running his offense, some young playmakers in Smith and Payton and veterans on defense — but the question is how quickly he can put the pieces together to build the Knights back into a winner. Three to four wins would be a solid starting point, though bowl eligibility isn't out of the question if a few breaks go their way.

SHAQUILL GRIFFIN

"Scott [Frost] has kind of come in and obviously changed everything around, but he needs to get his personnel in there to do what he likes to do."
— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	80	**Tre'Quan Smith (So.)**		Dredrick Snelson (Fr.)
WR	6	Tristan Payton (So.)	20	Taylor Oldham (Sr.)
WR	82	D'erren Wilson (So.)	83	Cam Stewart (So.)
LT	66	**Aaron Evans (Jr.)**	68	Charles Sprenkel (Jr.)
LG	72	**Tyler Hudanick (So.)**	70	Luke Palmer (So.)
C	73	**Jason Rae (Sr.)**	75	Tate Hernly (Jr.)
RG	79	Chavis Dickey (Jr.)	62	Micah Anderson (Sr.)
RT	78	**Wyatt Miller (So.)**	65	Christian Beard (So.)
TE	88	Jordan Akins (So.)	5	Jordan Franks (Jr.)
QB	13	**Justin Holman (Sr.)**	2	Nick Patti (Sr.)
RB	27	Taj McGowan (So.)	7	Dontravious Wilson (Sr.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE		Chris Mulumba (Jr.)		Josh Odigie (Jr.)
DT	95	**Jamiyus Pittman (Jr.)**	93	Tony Guerad (Jr.)
DT	59	Monte Taylor (Sr.)		Joe Sanders (Jr.)
OLB	18	Shaquem Griffin (Jr.)	34	Justin McDonald (Sr.)
ILB	16	Mark Rucker (Sr.)	52	Maurice Russell (Sr.)
ILB	40	**Chequan Burkett (Jr.)**	41	Demeitre Brim (Sr.)
OLB	51	Errol Clarke (Sr.)	56	Pat Jasinski (So.)
CB	10	**Shaquill Griffin (Sr.)**	31	Jeremy Boykins (Sr.)
CB	24	**D.J. Killings (Sr.)**	30	Rashard Causey (So.)
FS	21	**Drico Johnson (Sr.)**	25	Kyle Gibson (So.)
SS	22	T.J. Mutcherson (Sr.)	33	Tre Neal (So.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	11	Matthew Wright (So.)	KR	6	Tristan Payton (So.)
P	36	Caleb Houston (Sr.)	PR	6	Tristan Payton (So.)

BOLD indicates returning starter

RETURNING LEADERS

Passing: Justin Holman, 250-127-1,379-14, 7 TDs
Rushing: C.J. Jones, 93 att., 339 yds., 1 TD
Receiving: Tre'Quan Smith, 52 rec., 724 yds., 4 TDs
Tackles: Drico Johnson, 64
Sacks: Jamiyus Pittman, 4.5
Interceptions: Shaqill Griffin, 2

STAT CORNER

6.5

UCF allowed 6.5 yards per play in 2015, 2.1 yards worse than in 2014. No other FBS defense regressed that much.

UCF Athletics Communications

USF BULLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 37 • AAC EAST PREDICTION: 1 • PROJECTED RECORD: 9-4, 6-2 AAC

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Willie Taggart
Record at School: 14-23 (3 years)
Career Record: 30-43 (6 years)
Co-Offensive Coordinators: Darren Hiller, T.J. Weist
Defensive Coordinator: Raymond Woodie
Tampa, FL • Raymond James Stadium (65,890)

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	3	Towson
Sept.	10	Northern Illinois
Sept.	17	at Syracuse
Sept.	24	Florida State
Oct.	1	at Cincinnati
Oct.	8	East Carolina
Oct.	15	Connecticut
Oct.	21	at Temple
Oct.	28	Navy
Nov.	12	at Memphis
Nov.	19	at SMU
Nov.	26	UCF

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: 8-5, 6-2

Sept.	5	Florida A&M	W	51-3
Sept.	12	at Florida State	L	14-34
Sept.	19	at Maryland	L	17-35
Oct.	2	Memphis	L	17-24
Oct.	10	Syracuse	W	45-24
Oct.	17	at Connecticut	W	28-20
Oct.	24	SMU	W	38-14
Oct.	31	at Navy	L	17-29
Nov.	7	at East Carolina	W	22-17
Nov.	14	Temple	W	44-23
Nov.	20	Cincinnati	W	65-27
Nov.	26	at UCF	W	44-3
Dec.	21	vs. Western Kentucky #	L	35-45

#Miami Beach Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS

1. Darnell Salomon, WR, Miami, FL
2. Craig Watts, DB, St. Petersburg, FL
3. Tramal Ivy, DE, Muskogee, OK*
4. Josh Dunn, DB, Lake Wales, FL
5. Andre Polk, LB, Fort Myers, FL
6. Mi'Cario Stanley, LB, Cape Coral, FL
7. Christion Gainer, OL, Panama City, FL
8. Elijah Mack, RB, Punta Gorda, FL
9. LaDarrius Jackson, DE, Birmingham, AL*
10. Armunz Mathews, CB, Tallahassee, FL

*junior college transfer

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	AAC	NATIONAL
Scoring	33.6 ppg	6	41
Rushing	246.5 ypg	2	10
Passing	195.1 ypg	9	95
Total	441.6 ypg	5	35
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**AAC**	**NATIONAL**
Scoring	22.9 ppg	5	35
Rushing	141.4 ypg	3	31
Passing	239.1 ypg	7	85
Total	380.5 ypg	4	52
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**AAC**	**NATIONAL**
+10	+0.77	3	13

OFFENSE Junior running back Marlon Mack, who has 2,422 career rushing yards and 17 touchdowns in two seasons, is South Florida's best player and a legitimate All-America candidate.

Mack was a huge reason why the Bulls went 8–5 in 2015, snapping a streak of four consecutive losing seasons. But junior quarterback Quinton Flowers was the biggest impetus for the turnaround. Flowers was dynamic in his first season as full-time starter, accumulating 3,287 total yards and 34 touchdowns, including 991 yards rushing. He was known for spectacular playmaking skill but defined by his ability to avoid mistakes. "Quinton gave us an identity," coach Willie Taggart says. "We think he has some room to improve, but what he did was really impressive."

And now he has a capable backup in sophomore Asiantii Woulard, a UCLA transfer who was a four-star recruit in high school.

Flowers has a proliferation of targets at wide receiver, including senior Rodney Adams, who set the school's single-season receiving yards record, and junior Marquez Valdes-Scantling, a 6'3" transfer from NC State who caught everyone's attention with startling plays during spring drills.

The offensive line was a major strength in 2015 and had the same lineup for all 13 games. But now it must be retooled with the replacement of three starters.

DEFENSE The Bulls received bad news in the offseason when defensive coordinator Tom Allen, architect of the 4-2-5 alignment that transformed the unit into an aggressive, ball-hawking strength, left for the same position at Indiana.

But Raymond Woodie, the linebackers coach who was promoted, says the Bulls will keep the 4-2-5 and hopefully build upon its success, which included lofty national rankings in tackles for a loss (13th), interceptions (14th) and turnovers gained (24th).

The defensive leaders are junior middle linebacker Auggie Sanchez, who had 117 tackles, and senior weak-side linebacker Nigel Harris, a constant threat to make a splash play.

The secondary matured and features mix-and-match options such as junior cornerback Deatrick Nichols (a first-team all-conference performer), junior free safety Devin Abraham and sophomore cornerback Ronnie Hoggins.

Woodie says the defensive line will utilize its depth while keeping players fresh. Run-stuffing should be a strength with junior Deadrin Senat and sophomore Kevin Bronson leading the way at defensive tackle.

SPECIALISTS Taggart wants even more consistency from placekicker Emilio Nadelman, who made nine straight attempts to finish the regular season. After three seasons with Mattias Ciabatti, an expert at placing punts inside the 20-yard line, the Bulls will turn to sophomore Brent Gordon. Adams, despite limited opportunities on kickoffs, and junior Tajee Fullwood, ultra-dependable on punts, are among the nation's top return men.

FINAL ANALYSIS The Bulls made a huge leap last season, making their first bowl appearance since 2010. Now they return 14 starters, including exciting options at the skill positions, and that has prompted caution from Taggart. "We are a target," the coach says. "People are going to circle us on their schedule, and we will get everyone's best shot. But that's what we want. We want to be a team that people look to and expect big things from. I have to keep reminding our guys, 'We really haven't done anything yet.'"

USF could very well become one of the nation's most dangerous teams. But here's the key: The Bulls were well-versed in handling adversity. Can they handle prosperity? If so, they have conference title potential.

QUINTON FLOWERS

"[Quinton] Flowers was good. He's not as talented and doesn't throw it as well as [Houston's] Greg Ward, but he makes them go."
— An opposing AAC assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (7)

WR	87	**Rodney Adams (Sr.)**	8	Tyre McCants (So.)
WR	1	**Chris Barr (So.)**	82	Jordan Reed (So.)
WR	83	Marquez Valdes-Scantling (Jr.)	81	**Ryeshene Bronson (Jr.)**
LT	75	**Kofi Amichia (Sr.)**	77	Marcus Norman (Fr.)
LG	74	Cameron Ruff (Jr.)	73	Jeremi Hall (Jr.)
C	68	Michael Galati (So.)	72	Brooks Larkin (Fr.)
RG	61	**Dominique Threatt (Sr.)**	63	Michael Smith (So.)
RT	78	Billy Atterbury (Fr.)	70	Glen Bethel (Jr.)
TE	89	Mitchell Wilcox (Fr.)	85	Elkanah Dillon (So.)
QB	9	**Quinton Flowers (Jr.)**	4	Asiantii Woulard (So.)
RB	5	**Marlon Mack (Jr.)**	13	Darius Tice (Sr.)

DEFENSE (7)

DE	92	LaDarrius Jackson (So.)	98	Mike Love (Jr.)
DT	99	Kevin Bronson (So.)	94	Kirk Livingstone (Fr.)
DT	10	**Deadrin Senat (Jr.)**	60	Bruce Hector (So.)
DE	56	Juwan Brown (So.)	15	Vincent Jackson (So.)
MLB	43	**Auggie Sanchez (Jr.)**	33	Cecil Cherry (Fr.)
WLB	57	**Nigel Harris (Sr.)**	53	Danny Thomas (So.)
ROV	36	**Nate Godwin (Sr.)**	21	Khalid McGee (So.)
CB	3	**Deatrick Nichols (Jr.)**	30	Jalen Spencer (Sr.)
CB	19	**Ronnie Hoggins (So.)**	23	Mazzi Wilkins (So.)
SS	13	Tajee Fullwood (Jr.)	18	Jaymon Thomas (So.)
FS	20	**Devin Abraham (Jr.)**	34	Malik Dixon (Fr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	35	Emilio Nadelman (Jr.)	KR	87	Rodney Adams (Sr.)
P	41	Brent Gordon (So.)	PR	13	Tajee Fullwood (Jr.)

BOLD indicates returning starter

RETURNING LEADERS

Passing: Quinton Flowers, 276-163-2,296-8, 22 TDs
Rushing: Marlon Mack, 210 att., 1,381 yds., 8 TDs
Receiving: Rodney Adams, 45 rec., 822 yds., 9 TDs
Tackles: Auggie Sanchez, 117
Sacks: Bruce Hector, 5.0
Interceptions: Deatrick Nichols, 4

STAT CORNER

33.6

USF scored 33.6 points per game, nearly doubling its 2014 average of 17.2. The Bulls averaged 47.0 over their last four games.

Tom DiPace

CONFERENCE USA

C-USA PREVIEW

PREDICTED ORDER OF FINISH

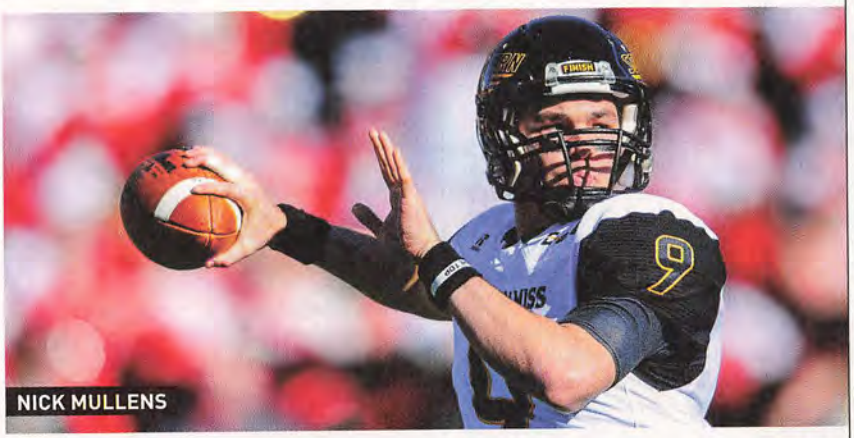
EAST

1. MTSU **BLUE RAIDERS** 8-5, 6-2 C-USA
2. MARSHALL **THUNDERING HERD** 8-4, 6-2 C-USA
3. WKU **HILLTOPPERS** 8-4, 6-2 C-USA
4. FAU **OWLS** 6-6, 4-4 C-USA
5. OLD DOMINION **MONARCHS** 6-6, 4-4 C-USA
6. FIU **PANTHERS** 4-8, 3-5 C-USA
7. CHARLOTTE **49ERS** 2-10, 1-7 C-USA

WEST

1. SOUTHERN MISS **GOLDEN EAGLES** 10-3, 7-1 C-USA
2. LOUISIANA TECH **BULLDOGS** 7-5, 5-3 C-USA
3. UTEP **MINERS** 7-5, 4-4 C-USA
4. RICE **OWLS** 4-8, 3-5 C-USA
5. USTA **ROADRUNNERS** 3-9, 2-6 C-USA
6. NORTH TEXAS **MEAN GREEN** 2-10, 1-7 C-USA

C-USA Championship: SOUTHERN MISS OVER MTSU



NICK MULLENS

Joshua Lindsey-USA TODAY Sports

2016 UNIT RANKINGS

	QB	RB	WR/TE	OL	DL	LB	DB
CHARLOTTE	13	9	6	12	12	9	8
FAU	9	8	8	7	4	3	4
FIU	4	10	9	8	11	1	10
LOUISIANA TECH	11	13	2	2	6	11	6
MARSHALL	3	12	4	3	2	5	3
MTSU	2	5	3	6	1	10	2
NORTH TEXAS	7	11	13	10	13	12	11
OLD DOMINION	6	3	5	11	7	7	7
RICE	12	7	11	9	9	8	13
SOUTHERN MISS	1	2	7	5	3	4	1
UTEP	10	4	10	4	10	6	9
UTSA	8	6	12	13	8	13	12
WKU	5	1	1	1	5	2	5

2015 BOWL RESULTS

HEART OF DALLAS BOWL: WASHINGTON 44, SOUTHERN MISS 31

MIAMI BEACH BOWL: WKU 45, SOUTH FLORIDA 35

ST. PETERSBURG BOWL: MARSHALL 16, CONNECTICUT 10

NEW ORLEANS BOWL: LOUISIANA TECH 47, ARKANSAS STATE 28

BAHAMAS BOWL: WESTERN MICHIGAN 45, MTSU 31

PRESEASON ALL-C-USA TEAMS

First-Team Offense

QB	Nick Mullens	6-1	196	Sr.	Southern Miss
RB	Ray Lawry	5-10	201	Jr.	Old Dominion
RB	Anthony Wales	5-10	195	Sr.	WKU
WR	Taywan Taylor	6-1	195	Sr.	WKU
WR	Trent Taylor	5-8	180	Sr.	Louisiana Tech
TE	Jonnu Smith	6-3	232	Sr.	FIU
C	Cameron Tom	6-4	287	Sr.	Southern Miss
OL	Reggie Bain	6-4	295	Jr.	FAU
OL	Forrest Lamp	6-4	300	Sr.	WKU
OL	Michael Selby	6-2	283	Sr.	Marshall
OL	Clint Van Horn	6-5	314	Sr.	Marshall
AP	Richie James	5-9	177	So.	MTSU

First-Team Defense

DL	Dylan Bradley	6-1	265	Sr.	Southern Miss
DL	Jaylon Ferguson	6-5	256	So.	Louisiana Tech
DL	Trey Hendrickson	6-4	270	Sr.	FAU
DL	Gary Thompson	6-1	252	Sr.	Marshall
LB	T.J. McCollum	6-3	230	Jr.	WKU
LB	T.J. Ricks	6-0	226	Sr.	Old Dominion
LB	Anthony Wint	6-0	224	Jr.	FIU
CB	Cornell Armstrong	5-11	180	Jr.	Southern Miss
CB	Jeremy Cutrer	6-2	170	Sr.	MTSU
S	Tiquan Lang	5-8	170	Sr.	Marshall
S	Xavier Woods	5-11	203	Sr.	Louisiana Tech

First-Team Specialists

K	Jonathan Barnes	5-9	268	Jr.	Louisiana Tech
P	Dalton Schomp	6-1	220	Sr.	FAU
KR	Kylen Towner	5-8	175	Jr.	WKU
PR	Trent Taylor	5-8	180	Sr.	Louisiana Tech

Second-Team Offense

QB	Brent Stockstill	6-0	209	So.	MTSU
RB	Aaron Jones	5-10	205	Jr.	UTEP
RB	Jarveon Williams	5-9	195	Jr.	UTSA
WR	Zach Pascal	6-2	214	Sr.	Old Dominion
WR	D.J. Thompson	6-3	200	Sr.	Southern Miss
TE	Ryan Yurachek	6-3	233	Jr.	Marshall
C	Michael Montero	6-2	299	Sr.	FIU
OL	Darrell Brown	6-4	315	Sr.	Louisiana Tech
OL	Will Hernandez	6-3	340	Jr.	UTEP
OL	Brandon Ray	6-2	285	Jr.	WKU
OL	Maurquice Shakir	6-3	316	Sr.	MTSU
AP	Ito Smith	5-9	195	Jr.	Southern Miss

Second-Team Defense

DL	Ryan Bee	6-7	263	So.	Marshall
DL	Marcus Davenport	6-6	220	Jr.	UTSA
DL	Larry Ogunjobi	6-3	294	Sr.	Charlotte
DL	Oshane Ximines	6-3	240	So.	Old Dominion
LB	D'Nerius Antoine	6-0	215	Sr.	Southern Miss
LB	Keith Brown	6-1	235	Sr.	WKU
LB	Alex Lyons	6-1	230	Sr.	Rice
CB	Mike Minter	6-0	172	Jr.	MTSU
CB	Aaron Young	5-11	185	Sr.	Old Dominion
S	Kishawn McClain	5-11	201	Jr.	North Texas
S	Marcus Ward	6-3	210	Sr.	WKU

Second-Team Specialists

K	Jay Mattox	6-0	185	Sr.	UTEP
P	Alan Luna	6-0	190	Jr.	UTEP
KR	Carlos Henderson	5-11	194	Jr.	Louisiana Tech
PR	Richie James	5-9	177	So.	MTSU

FLORIDA ATLANTIC OWLS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 103 • C-USA EAST PREDICTION: 4 • PROJECTED RECORD: 6-6, 4-4 C-USA

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Charlie Partridge
Record at School: 6-18 (2 years)
Career Record: 6-18 (2 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Travis Trickett
Defensive Coordinator: Roc Bellantoni
Boca Raton, FL • FAU Stadium (29,419)

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	3	Southern Illinois
Sept.	10	at Miami
Sept.	17	at Kansas State
Sept.	24	Ball State
Oct.	1	at FIU
Oct.	8	Charlotte
Oct.	15	at Marshall
Oct.	29	Western Kentucky
Nov.	5	at Rice
Nov.	12	UTEP
Nov.	19	Old Dominion
Nov.	26	at Middle Tennessee

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: 3-9, 3-5

Sept.	5	at Tulsa	(ot) L	44-47
Sept.	11	Miami	L	20-44
Sept.	19	Buffalo	L	15-33
Sept.	26	at Charlotte	W	17-7
Oct.	10	Rice	L	26-27
Oct.	17	Marshall	L	17-33
Oct.	24	at UTEP	L	17-27
Oct.	31	FIU	W	31-17
Nov.	7	at Western Kentucky	L	19-35
Nov.	14	Middle Tennessee	L	17-24
Nov.	21	at Florida	(ot) L	14-20
Nov.	28	at Old Dominion	W	33-31

TOP 10 RECRUITS

1. Steven Frank, QB, Oswego, IL
2. Kevin McCrary, DT, Daytona Beach, FL
3. Brandon Walton, OT, Largo, FL
4. Will Davis, DT, Fort Pierce, FL
5. Korel Smith, CB, Hollywood, FL
6. Da'Von Brown, CB, Belle Glade, FL
7. John Mitchell, WR, Tallahassee, FL
8. Rashad Smith, LB, Homestead, FL
9. Devin Singletary, RB, Deefield Beach, FL
10. Antonio Hadden, WR, Fort Pierce, FL

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	C-USA	NATIONAL
Scoring	22.5 ppg	10	105
Rushing	164.8 ypg	5	72
Passing	213.1 ypg	9	75
Total	377.8 ypg	7	81
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**C-USA**	**NATIONAL**
Scoring	28.8 ppg	6	83
Rushing	168.4 ypg	7	66
Passing	236.7 ypg	6	81
Total	405.1 ypg	4	70
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**C-USA**	**NATIONAL**
-2	-0.17	8	85

OFFENSE Along with installing the #NoHuddleNoMercy up-tempo offense he brought from Samford, new offensive coordinator Travis Trickett's biggest task will be choosing a quarterback. The candidates are young but talented. Sophomore Jason Driskel — younger brother of Jeff, the former Florida and Louisiana Tech QB — started two games and saw action in 10, throwing for 965 yards, three TDs and four interceptions. Freshman Daniel Parr spurned a late recruiting push from Miami to sign with FAU — then wowed coaches with arm strength and playbook mastery while redshirting last season. Even before the start of spring practices, coach Charlie Partridge proclaimed that the Driskel/Parr battle would carry into fall camp — maybe longer.

Whichever signal caller Trickett, son of FSU offensive line coach Rick Trickett, ultimately selects will benefit from a deep crop of ball carriers. In junior Buddy Howell and senior Jay Warren, the Owls return two backs who have combined to start 15 games and rush for 1,871 yards over the past two seasons. Future feature back Devin Singletary, an incoming freshman who flipped from Illinois to FAU on Signing Day, could become a factor this season.

Nate Terry is primed to emerge as the Owls' main receiving threat. At 6'6" with long arms, Terry made the move from tight end to slot receiver in the spring, and his adaptation delighted coaches. He should continue to be a strong red zone threat. Sliding Terry wide opens more playing time for tight end Tyler Cameron, who transferred to FAU from Wake Forest as a quarterback prior to last season but moved to tight end and became an unexpected threat in 2015.

DEFENSE FAU's 2015 youth movement strongly positioned the Owls for this season. At 6'4", 280 pounds and possessing good power and speed, end Trey Hendrickson is the elder statesman. He's not the kind of player who usually makes his way to FAU. Hendrickson's 13.5 sacks tied for second in the nation last season, but with tackles Trevon Coley and Brandin Bryant now pursuing NFL careers, Hendrickson will have to try to repeat that performance against offenses geared to negate him.

Tackles Ray Ellis and Steven Leggett are run stoppers who are still developing pass-rush technique. FAU has demonstrated a surprising willingness to start a true freshman at defensive tackle, and incoming freshman Kevin McCrary is the most heralded defensive lineman ever signed by FAU.

The defense will be young, but it will be experienced. FAU played 10 true freshmen on defense and special teams last year, and the youngsters proved worthy of the playing time. Linebacker Azeez Al-Shaair led the Owls with 94 tackles, earning Freshman All-America honors from one outlet.

The three touchdowns Ocie Rose scored last season were only two off the team lead — and he was the nickel back. Jalen Young intercepted three passes and made 69 tackles.

SPECIALISTS Dalton Schomp led the nation in punting last season, averaging 48.0 yards, but is it ever a positive to put an image of the punter on the cover of the spring media guide, like FAU did? Schomp is the leading name in what has been an average-at-best special teams unit. FAU signed Landon Scheer in 2014, touting him as the top kicker in the nation. He's yet to beat out walk-on Greg Joseph.

FINAL ANALYSIS Entering his third season as FAU coach, Partridge has a team athletic enough to compete with every program in Conference USA. With non-conference home games against Southern Illinois and Ball State, anything short of bowl eligibility will be disappointing. If the young quarterbacks can quickly get a handle on Trickett's offense, the Owls should head into conference play with momentum for the first time since, well, ever.

REGGIE BAIN

"I know they didn't win very many, but if you really look at it, they were only a few plays away from going to a bowl game."

— An opposing C-USA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	15	Kamrin Solomon (Jr.)	8	Bobby Mitchell (So.)
WR	4	**Kalib Woods (Jr.)**	2	James Brunson (Fr.)
WR	80	Nate Terry (Jr.)	1	**Henry Bussey (Jr.)**
LT	58	**Reggie Bain (Jr.)**	74	Byers Hickmon (So.)
LG	66	**Dillon DeBoer (Sr.)**	65	Tarrick Thomas (Fr.)
C	77	Roman Fernandez (Jr.)	78	Richard Williams (Fr.)
RG	53	**Jakobi Smith (Jr.)**	64	Antonyo Woods (Jr.)
RT	76	**Kelly Parfitt (Sr.)**	66	Dillon DeBoer (Sr.)
TE	3	Tyler Cameron (Sr.)	10	Dustin Bowens (Jr.)
QB	13	Daniel Parr (Fr.)	16	Jason Driskel (So.)
RB	9	Buddy Howell (Jr.)	25	Jay Warren (Sr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	94	Hunter Snyder (So.)	8	Nick Internicola (Jr.)
DT	56	Steven Leggett (So.)	17	Denzel Whitfield (Sr.)
DT	11	Ray Ellis (Jr.)	90	Shalom Ogbonda (Sr.)
DE	9	**Trey Hendrickson (Sr.)**	98	Haiden Nagel (Jr.)
LB	2	**Azeez Al-Shaair (So.)**	47	Jerrad Ward (Jr.)
LB	50	**Nate Ozdemir (Jr.)**	45	Jacob Douglas (So.)
NB	1	**Ocie Rose (So.)**	5	DJ Juste (Sr.)
CB	23	Raekwon Williams (Jr.)	12	Kemar Downer (So.)
CB	10	**Herb Miller (So.)**	3	Shelton Lewis (So.)
SS	18	**Jalen Young (So.)**	19	Jake Stoshak (So.)
FS	14	Andrew Soroh (So.)	24	Lester Thomas (Sr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	17	Greg Joseph (Sr.)	KR	20	Marcus Clark (Jr.)
P	67	Dalton Schomp (Sr.)	PR	1	Henry Bussey (Jr.)

BOLD indicates returning starter

RETURNING LEADERS

Passing: Jason Driskel, 151-77-965-4, 3 TDs
Rushing: Greg Howell, 133 att., 598 yds., 3 TDs
Receiving: Henry Bussey, 29 rec., 236 yds., 0 TDs
Tackles: Azeez Al-Shaair, 94
Sacks: Trey Hendrickson, 13.5
Interceptions: Jalen Young, 3; Ocie Rose, 3

STAT CORNER

3.2

FAU averaged just 3.2 points per trip inside the 40, 123rd in FBS. Field position was a strength, but the Owls couldn't capitalize.

Ralph Notaro

FIU PANTHERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 105 • **C-USA EAST PREDICTION:** 6 • **PROJECTED RECORD:** 4-8, 3-5 C-USA

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Ron Turner
Record at School: 10-26 (3 years)
Career Record: 52-87 (12 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Steve Shankweiler
Defensive Coordinator: Matt House
Miami, FL • FIU Stadium (20,000)

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	1	Indiana
Sept.	10	Maryland
Sept.	17	at Massachusetts
Sept.	24	UCF
Oct.	1	Florida Atlantic
Oct.	8	at UTEP
Oct.	15	at Charlotte
Oct.	22	Louisiana Tech
Oct.	29	Middle Tennessee
Nov.	5	at Western Kentucky
Nov.	19	Marshall
Nov.	26	at Old Dominion

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: 5-7, 3-5

Sept.	3	at UCF	W	15-14
Sept.	12	Indiana	L	22-36
Sept.	19	NC Central	W	39-14
Sept.	26	at Louisiana Tech	L	17-27
Oct.	3	at Massachusetts	L	14-24
Oct.	10	UTEP	W	52-12
Oct.	17	at Middle Tennessee	L	34-42
Oct.	24	Old Dominion	W	41-12
Oct.	31	at Florida Atlantic	L	17-31
Nov.	7	Charlotte	W	48-31
Nov.	14	at Marshall	L	0-52
Nov.	21	Western Kentucky	L	7-63

TOP 10 RECRUITS

1. D'Angelo Ware, RB, Moore Haven, FL
2. Khairi Reaser, CB, Miami, FL*
3. Tony Gaiter, WR, Homestead, FL
4. Andrew Tarver, DT, Powder Springs, GA
5. Jose Borregales, K, Miami, FL
6. Hunter Orem, QB, Lakeland, FL
7. Stantley Thomas, WR, Punta Gorda, FL
8. Shakur Cooper, OLB, Miami, FL
9. Darrius Scott, WR, Miami, FL
10. Isaiah Brown, CB, Tampa, FL

*junior college transfer

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	C-USA	NATIONAL
Scoring	25.5 ppg	7	90
Rushing	109.9 ypg	13	122
Passing	237.8 ypg	5	52
Total	347.8 ypg	10	106
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**C-USA**	**NATIONAL**
Scoring	29.8 ppg	7	85
Rushing	185.1 ypg	9	83
Passing	221.0 ypg	2	61
Total	406.1 ypg	7	76
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**C-USA**	**NATIONAL**
+3	+0.25	3	46

OFFENSE Quarterback Alex McGough enters his third year as the starter and leads a unit that has nine starters returning from 2015 — a season in which McGough threw for 2,722 yards and 21 touchdowns with just eight interceptions.

Every skill position returns a playmaker from 2015. Running back Alex Gardner is back after a season in which he eclipsed 1,200 yards from scrimmage (760 rushing, 442 receiving) and scored 10 touchdowns. He's joined by a pair of talented pass-catching threats in tight end Jonnu Smith and wide receiver Thomas Owens.

Along the offensive front, Michael Montero leads a veteran group that needs to improve its run blocking to allow the Panthers to see offensive continuity.

The knock on FIU's offense is the lack of the big play, which needs to change in the 2016 season. Given the unit's experience, big-play capability (or lack thereof) could be the difference.

DEFENSE The strength of the defense is at safety, where Niko Gonzalez and Tyree Johnson bring playmaking ability and experience to the back end. That experience offsets the losses of talented cornerbacks Richard Leonard and Jeremiah McKinnon.

Anthony Wint led FIU with 88 tackles in 2015, and Treyvon Williams and Davison Colimon return from injuries to give the Panthers a strong corps of linebackers. Look for Vontarius West to be a playmaker after gaining much needed experience last season.

FIU will have to find newcomers to establish a pass rush with three of four starting defensive linemen gone. Imarjaye Albury, a senior, is the lone returnee on the line; the onus is on FIU to find young talent to step up at the defensive end spots.

The Panthers hope to avoid the injury bug and establish a pass rush. If they're able to do so, the athleticism is there to make plays. Again, with so much experience on offense, the defense needs to be good, not great. Last year, they weren't good.

SPECIALISTS FIU's special teams unit was solid in 2015. Placekicker Austin Taylor is back, as is punter Stone Wilson. Numbers weren't bad across the board, but given that C-USA had some of the nation's best in the kicking game, continued improvement is a must. FIU needs to find someone to replace Leonard, who was a do-it-all return guy. Look for Anthony Jones to emerge as the primary option early, but head coach Ron Turner will try out several people in an attempt to get that explosive factor that Leonard brought to the table.

FINAL ANALYSIS This goals for this season can be summed up with one word: consistency. If FIU can be consistent, the schedule sets up for seven or eight wins. However, if both sides of the ball are inconsistent, FIU could be staring at a three- or four-win season.

McGough has to take the next step as a leader and find ways to win close games. FIU's offense could be one of the surprises of C-USA in 2016 — if all returning parts continue to build chemistry and take care of the football. Defensively, it's all about the pass rush. If FIU can establish solid ends, the talent is there in other spots to see the defense improve. Without a rush, young cornerbacks are going to have a world of trouble against C-USA receivers.

The Panthers' schedule sets up to give them momentum and confidence heading down the stretch. After opening against Indiana and Maryland, the next five games don't feature an opponent projected to be in the top 100 out of 128 FBS teams. They need to take advantage.

ALEX MCGOUGH

"I think Ron is getting his traction down there, and they obviously made a big jump in the win column so they're heading in the right direction."
— An opposing C-USA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (9)

WR	81	**Thomas Owens (Jr.)**	84	Shawn Abrams (Sr.)
WR	5	Julian Williams (Jr.)	9	Shug Oyegunle (Jr.)
LT	75	**Edens Sineace (Sr.)**	7	Dieugot Joseph (Sr.)
LG	66	Jordan Budwig (Jr.)	79	**Kai Absheer (So.)**
C	64	**Michael Montero (Sr.)**	76	Neal Mars (So.)
RG	69	**Chris Miller (So.)**	73	Trenton Saunders (Sr.)
RT	65	**Daquane Wilkie (So.)**	78	Dieugot Joseph (Sr.)
TE	86	A.J. Branisel (Jr.)	85	Ricky Fernandez (Sr.)
TE	87	**Jonnu Smith (Sr.)**	88	Jonathan Pavlov (Jr.)
QB	12	**Alex McGough (Jr.)**	8	Christian Alexander (Fr.)
RB	1	**Alex Gardner (Jr.)**	2	Anthony Jones (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	7	Fermin Silva (So.)	92	John Broome (So.)
DT	94	Marques Cheeks (Sr.)	46	Milord Juste (So.)
DT	93	**Imarjaye Albury (Sr.)**	98	Leonard Washington (Sr.)
DE	99	Jermaine Sheriff (So.)	71	R.J. Harris (Fr.)
LB	53	**Anthony Wint (Jr.)**	57	Jordan Guest (Jr.)
LB	52	Treyvon Williams (Sr.)	41	Fred Russ (Jr.)
LB	35	Davison Colimon (Sr.)	29	**Vontarius West (Jr.)**
CB	21	Kenyatta Anderson (So.)	20	Emmanuel Lubin (So.)
CB	28	Deonte Wilson (Sr.)	20	Emmanuel Lubin (So.)
S	33	**Niko Gonzalez (Jr.)**	27	Xavier Hines (Jr.)
S	31	Tyree Johnson (So.)	25	Isaiah Hill (Fr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	43	Austin Taylor (Sr.)	KR	2	Anthony Jones (So.)
P	6	Stone Wilson (So.)	PR	2	Anthony Jones (So.)

BOLD indicates returning starter

RETURNING LEADERS

Passing: Alex McGough, 420-269-2,722-8, 21 TDs
Rushing: Alex Gardner, 186 att., 760 yds., 9 TDs
Receiving: Alex Gardner, 60 rec., 442 yds., 1 TD
Tackles: Anthony Wint, 88
Sacks: Mark Bruno, 1; Xavier Hines, 1
Interceptions: Niko Gonzalez, 2

STAT CORNER

2

Ron Turner has been a head coach for 12 seasons. Only twice has his team had a winning record in league play.

FIU Athletics

LOUISIANA TECH BULLDOGS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 85 • C-USA WEST PREDICTION: 2 • PROJECTED RECORD: 7-5, 5-3 C-USA

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Skip Holtz
Record at School: 22-17 (3 years)
Career Record: 110-88 (16 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Todd Fitch
Defensive Coordinator: Blake Baker
Ruston, LA • Joe Aillet Stadium (28,019)

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	3	at Arkansas
Sept.	10	South Carolina St.
Sept.	17	at Texas Tech
Sept.	24	at Middle Tennessee
Oct.	1	UTEP
Oct.	8	Western Kentucky
Oct.	15	at Massachusetts
Oct.	22	at FIU
Oct.	29	Rice
Nov.	5	at North Texas
Nov.	12	UTSA
Nov.	26	at Southern Miss

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: 9-4, 6-2

Sept.	5	Southern	W	62-15
Sept.	10	at Western Kentucky	L	38-41
Sept.	19	at Kansas State (ot)	L	33-39
Sept.	26	FIU	W	27-17
Oct.	3	UL Lafayette	W	43-14
Oct.	10	at UTSA	W	34-31
Oct.	17	at Mississippi State	L	20-45
Oct.	24	Middle Tennessee	W	45-16
Oct.	30	at Rice	W	42-17
Nov.	7	North Texas	W	56-13
Nov.	21	at UTEP	W	17-15
Nov.	28	Southern Miss	L	24-58
Dec.	19	vs. Arkansas State #	W	47-28

#New Orleans Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS

1. Willie Baker, DE, New Roads, LA
2. Ka'Derrion Mason, DE, McComb, MS
3. Jack Abraham, QB, Oxford, MS
4. Taylor Fondal, G, New Iberia, LA
5. David Beasley, WR, Pine Bluff, AR
6. Kalan Ritchie, DE, Goodse Creek, SC*
7. Jon Randall Belton, QB, West Monroe, LA
8. Devin Hamilton, LB, Lake Charles, LA
9. Zach Cousar, TE, Oxford, MS
10. L'Jarius Sneed, DB, Minden, LA

*junior college transfer

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	C-USA	NATIONAL
Scoring	37.5 ppg	3	19
Rushing	159.6 ypg	7	81
Passing	323.2 ypg	3	13
Total	482.8 ypg	3	21
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**C-USA**	**NATIONAL**
Scoring	26.8 ppg	5	62
Rushing	119.3 ypg	1	13
Passing	256.5 ypg	9	100
Total	375.8 ypg	2	48
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**C-USA**	**NATIONAL**
+1	+0.08	4	61

OFFENSE Unlike the past two seasons, an experienced quarterback will not be transferring in to take control of Skip Holtz's offense. Ryan Higgins, who started as a freshman in 2013 before backing up Cody Sokol and then Jeff Driskel, reclaimed the starting role after a strong performance in the spring.

Higgins is comfortable running some zone read, but his primary job will be getting the ball out to a talented receiving corps. Louisiana Tech lines up four wide receivers in its base set, and it has strong options both inside (Trent Taylor) and outside (Carlos Henderson). Standing just 5'8", Taylor was a first-team All-C-USA performer last year after finishing second in the league with 99 catches. Henderson is a burner, and he will be joined by Utah transfer Alfred Smith, who appears to have just as much speed as Henderson.

The offensive line is in great shape, with three returning starters, and a fourth — Kirby Wixson — who started in 2014 but missed 2015 due to injury. Guard O'Shea Dugas was a Freshman All-American, and left tackle Darrell Brown was second-team All-C-USA.

At running back, Kenneth Dixon (second all time in NCAA career touchdowns) is gone, and it will be three players combining to fill his shoes in an offense that primarily lines up with one running back. Former walk-on Boston Scott led the team in rushing in the New Orleans Bowl and likely will start given his superior ability to break tackles. Jarred Craft is more of a short-yardage banger, and Jaqwis Dancy is a breakaway guy who could be a threat in the passing game.

DEFENSE With eight starters gone from a unit that ranked 62nd in scoring defense, the Bulldogs certainly face some challenges. The secondary returns just one starter, though it is a good one in safety Xavier Woods, an All-C-USA selection. The starting cornerbacks will be Arizona State transfer Ronald Lewis and Ephraim Kitchen. Another transfer, Jerrell Jackson from Hawaii, will be heavily in the mix, and junior college transfer DaMarion King should fill the nickel role as the Bulldogs attempt to improve their national ranking of 100th in passing defense.

All three linebackers will be new, and there is concern as to who will step up. Russell Farris should be an every-down linebacker along with Brandon Durman, while a pair of redshirt freshmen in Donald Freeman and Collin Scott will try to become effective against the run.

The defensive line will feature a pair of strong defensive ends in Jaylon Ferguson and Aaron Brown, but losing NFL-bound Vernon Butler at defensive tackle leaves a gaping hole in the middle.

SPECIALISTS Both kickers and long-snapper Darrell Travis are back. Placekicker Jonathan Barnes nailed 22-of-26 field goals, including 6-of-8 from beyond 40 yards. Punter Gerald Shouse had eight punts of more than 50 yards last season. The punt returner will again be Taylor, and Henderson was an honorable mention All-C-USA kick returner.

FINAL ANALYSIS With at least eight wins in four of the last five seasons, Louisiana Tech has established itself as one of the stronger Group of 5 programs in the nation. A very challenging September awaits, with non-conference road games against Arkansas and Texas Tech and a visit to C-USA East favorite Middle Tennessee. A green defense and new quarterback may not be ready for that gauntlet, but there are pieces in place for the Bulldogs to put things together in the second half of the season. Expect Louisiana Tech to stay in the top 30 in the nation in points scored. How many they are able to keep off the board will determine if a fourth bowl game in six years becomes a reality.

TRENT TAYLOR

"They're probably the best team in the division on paper, but you say that with an asterisk because this is their third straight year with a new QB."
— An opposing C-USA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	1	**Carlos Henderson (Jr.)**	84	Javonte Woodard (Fr.)
WR	5	**Trent Taylor (Sr.)**	16	Marcus Gaines (So.)
WR	9	Conner Smith (Sr.)	**80**	**Kam McKnight (So.)**
WR	85	Alfred Smith (Fr.)	13	Marlon Watts (Jr.)
LT	**75**	**Darrell Brown (Sr.)**	72	Derek Edinburgh Jr. (Sr.)
LG	**74**	**O'Shea Dugas (So.)**	63	Deontae McCrady (So.)
C	62	Joseph Brunson (Sr.)	**55**	**David Mahaffey (Sr.)**
RG	73	Kirby Wixson (Sr.)	61	Ethan Reed (Fr.)
RT	66	Shane Carpenter (So.)		Joshua Outlaw (Jr.)
QB	14	Ryan Higgins (Sr.)	10	Price Wilson (So.)
RB	30	Boston Scott (Jr.)	22	Jarred Craft (Jr.)

DEFENSE (3)

DE	45	Jaylon Ferguson (So.)		Willie Baker (Fr.)
DT	94	Jordan Bradford (So.)	91	Cedric Johnson (So.)
DT	90	Courtney Wallace (So.)	99	Keonatye Garner (So.)
DE	**98**	**Aaron Brown (Sr.)**	**50**	**Deldrick Canty (Jr.)**
LB	31	Russell Farris (Jr.)	4	Michael Mims (Jr.)
LB	54	Brandon Durman (So.)	11	Lloyd Grogan (Sr.)
LB	46	Donald Freeman (Fr.)	35	Collin Scott (Fr.)
CB	14	Ronald Lewis (Jr.)	36	Jerrell Jackson (So.)
CB	37	Ephraim Kitchen (Fr.)	32	Trey Spencer (So.)
S	**7**	**Xavier Woods (So.)**	34	Theron Williams (So.)
S	2	Secdrick Cooper (Jr.)	8	DaMarion King (Jr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	10	Jonathan Barnes (Jr.)	KR	1	Carlos Henderson (Jr.)
P	28	Gerald Shouse (Sr.)	PR	5	Trent Taylor (Sr.)

BOLD indicates returning starter

RETURNING LEADERS

Passing: Ryan Higgins, 25-15-138-3, 1 TD
Rushing: Boston Scott, 34 att., 275 yds., 0 TDs
Receiving: Trent Taylor, 99 rec., 1,282 yds., 9 TDs
Tackles: Xavier Woods, 56
Sacks: Jaylon Ferguson, 6.0
Interceptions: Xavier Woods, 3

STAT CORNER

1.6

The Bulldogs had the best per-play yardage margin in C-USA (+1.6), but ranking 93rd in field position margin held them back.

Tom Morris/LATechSportsPix

MTSU BLUE RAIDERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 70 • **C-USA EAST PREDICTION:** 1 • **PROJECTED RECORD:** 8-5, 6-2 C-USA

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Rick Stockstill
Record at School: 64-61 (10 years)
Career Record: 64-61 (10 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Tony Franklin
Defensive Coordinator: Tyrone Nix
Murfreesboro, TN • Floyd Stadium (30,788)

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	3	Alabama A&M
Sept.	10	at Vanderbilt
Sept.	17	at Bowling Green
Sept.	24	Louisiana Tech
Oct.	1	at North Texas
Oct.	15	Western Kentucky
Oct.	22	at Missouri
Oct.	29	at FIU
Nov.	5	UTSA
Nov.	12	at Marshall
Nov.	19	at Charlotte
Nov.	26	Florida Atlantic

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: 7-6, 6-2

Sept.	5	Jackson State	W	70-14
Sept.	12	at Alabama	L	10-37
Sept.	19	Charlotte	W	73-14
Sept.	26	at Illinois	L	25-27
Oct.	3	Vanderbilt	L	13-17
Oct.	10	at Western Kentucky	L	28-58
Oct.	17	FIU	W	42-34
Oct.	24	at Louisiana Tech	L	16-45
Nov.	7	Marshall	W	27-24
Nov.	14	at Florida Atlantic	W	24-17
Nov.	21	North Texas	W	41-7
Nov.	28	at UTSA	W	42-7
Dec.	24	vs. Western Michigan #	L	31-45

#Bahamas Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS

1. Tyshawn Brown, DB, Atlanta, GA
2. Rakavian Poydras, DT, Clarksville, TN
3. Ty Lee, WR, Moultrie, GA
4. Treyton Peters, OT, Rockwood, TN
5. C.J. Windham, WR, Powder Springs, GA
6. Reginald Henderson, WR, Clewiston, FL
7. Kyle Banks, QB, Acworth, GA
8. Chris Myers, DE, La Vergne, TN
9. Ricky Blair, WR, Hacienda Heights, CA*
10. Caleb Felton, LB, Muscle Shoals, AL

*junior college transfer

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	C-USA	NATIONAL
Scoring	34.0 ppg	4	35
Rushing	145.7 ypg	12	99
Passing	311.7 ypg	4	15
Total	457.4 ypg	4	32
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**C-USA**	**NATIONAL**
Scoring	26.6 ppg	4	60
Rushing	152.2 ypg	3	48
Passing	253.5 ypg	8	96
Total	405.6 ypg	6	74
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**C-USA**	**NATIONAL**
-4	-0.31	9	92

OFFENSE The record-breaking freshman passing tandem of Brent Stockstill and Richie James returns for Act Two. Stockstill, son of head coach Rick Stockstill, passed for 4,005 yards, just 52 yards shy of Jameis Winston's NCAA freshman record (4,057). James had 108 receptions for 1,346 yards, breaking school records in both categories. They led MTSU's most productive offensive season in program history. Most of the records they broke were set in 2009 under offensive coordinator Tony Franklin, who returns to his old job this season. Franklin has spent the past six seasons at Louisiana Tech and Cal, but he's back in Murfreesboro to take over a rising offense with a high ceiling.

Ole Miss transfer I'Tavius Mathers returns to his hometown to be the primary running back. He rushed for 1,061 yards over three seasons in the SEC. Desmond Anderson, an explosive sophomore, should be his sidekick in the backfield. There are a couple of holes on the offensive line, but depth from last season should fill the gaps well enough.

Franklin's offense works best with a deep rotation of wide receivers. Terry Pettis is a 6'5" freakish athlete who had 612 receiving yards last season, and experienced wideout Demetrius Frazier is also back. But more targets will be needed. Shane Tucker's move from running back to slot receiver could make a big impact. He has been an all-purpose playmaker for his whole career, racking up 20 TDs.

DEFENSE Big holes remain at linebacker and safety as five of the top six tacklers from last season graduated. The defensive line and cornerbacks should be strong, but there's some work to do for veteran defensive coordinator Tyrone Nix in solidifying the unit. Safety Kevin Byard, one of the best players in program history with a school-record 19 career interceptions, must be replaced by sophomore Jovante Moffatt and other inexperienced defenders.

There are new starters at linebacker. D.J. Sanders is a speedy playmaker. Myles Harges is a physical tackler who missed most of 2015 with injuries. Chris Melton and Darius Harris are promising youngsters. They are all athletic.

The defensive line is stocked with experience, including senior bookends Steven Rhodes and Chris Hale. Cornerbacks Mike Minter and Jeremy Cutrer make up one of the best coverage duos in Conference USA. Minter is among the team's best all-around players, and Cutrer is a ball-hawk who led MTSU in passes defended (13) last season.

SPECIALISTS Placekicker is open after starter Cody Clark (12-of-16 FGs) left over a scholarship dispute. Canon Rooker will try to transition from kickoff specialist to placekicker, but freshman Crews Holt will be another option. Matt Bonadies is back at punter after a steady freshman season in which he averaged 41.3 yards per boot. James and Desmond Anderson are the likely punt and kick returners, respectively, but both positions could be flexible.

FINAL ANALYSIS MTSU can be penciled in for at least six wins, as the Blue Raiders have reached bowl eligibility in six of the last seven seasons. But this schedule has an obstacle with only five home games, which is especially key since MTSU has a 15–3 home record and 6–14 road/neutral mark over the past three seasons. There is a tough three-game stretch early on at Vanderbilt, at defending MAC champion Bowling Green and at home against Louisiana Tech.

A strong start would benefit the Blue Raiders, as the back half of the conference schedule gets easier. A Nov. 12 trip to Marshall, per usual, could carry ramifications in the East Division race. If the offense puts together another record-breaking year and the defense finds a pass rusher and new sources for disruptive plays, MTSU could be a Conference USA contender.

BRENT STOCKSTILL

"They have a ton of formations — unbalanced sets, jet sweeps, fake jets. They stretch you horizontally with the run, and they have a nice pass game."
— An opposing C-USA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	87	**Richie James (So.)**	48	Max Linder (So.)
WR	7	Jocquez Bruce (Fr.)	10	Ty Clemons (So.)
WR	84	**Terry Pettis (Sr.)**	1	Shane Tucker (Sr.)
WR	13	Demetrius Frazier (Sr.)		Jermel Walker (Jr.)
LT	55	Carlos Johnson (So.)	74	Robert Behanan (So.)
LG	63	Josh Chester (Sr.)	79	DeAndre Ford (So.)
C	66	**Daniel Stephens (Sr.)**	72	Josh Fannin (Fr.)
RG	73	**Chandler Brewer (So.)**		Angelo Owens (Jr.)
RT	56	**Maurquice Shakir (Sr.)**	65	Hunter Rogers (Sr.)
QB	12	**Brent Stockstill (So.)**	19	John Urzua (Fr.)
RB	32	I'Tavius Mathers (Sr.)	25	Desmond Anderson (So.)

DEFENSE (5)

DE	49	**Steven Rhodes (Sr.)**	11	Peter Bailey (Sr.)
DT	99	Jamal McBride (Sr.)	90	Patrick Stewart (So.)
DT	51	**Shaquille Huff (Sr.)**	97	Raynard Felton (Sr.)
DE	59	**Chris Hale (Sr.)**	91	Justin Atkins (Jr.)
OLB	31	D.J. Sanders (Jr.)		Dale Craig (Fr.)
MLB	33	Myles Harges (Jr.)	36	Richie Bisaccia (Jr.)
OLB	40	Chris Melton (So.)	30	Darius Harris (So.)
CB	47	**Mike Minter (Jr.)**	28	Dontavious Heard (Sr.)
CB	9	**Jeremy Cutrer (Sr.)**		Charvarius Ward (Jr.)
SS	2	Alex Dale (Jr.)	29	Darryl Randolph (So.)
FS	7	Jovante Moffatt (So.)	46	Vernon Walker (Fr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	15	Canon Rooker (Jr.)	KR	25 Desmond Anderson (So.)
P	99	Matt Bonadies (So.)	PR	87 Richie James (So.)

BOLD indicates returning starter

RETURNING LEADERS

Passing: Brent Stockstill, 490-327-4,005-9, 30 TDs
Rushing: Shane Tucker, 127 att., 413 yds., 2 TDs
Receiving: Richie James, 108 rec., 1,346 yds., 8 TDs
Tackles: Michael Minter, 55
Sacks: Chris Hale, 4.0
Interceptions: Jeremy Cutrer, 3

STAT CORNER

29.5

MTSU recovered only 29.5 percent of fumbles in 2015, worst in FBS, but still improved to 7–6. If the bad luck reverses, look out.

SOUTHERN MISS GOLDEN EAGLES

NATIONAL FORECAST: 68 • C-USA WEST PREDICTION: 1 • PROJECTED RECORD: 10-3, 7-1 C-USA

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jay Hopson
Record at School: First Season
Career Record: 32–17 (4 years)
Co-Offensive Coordinators: Shannon Dawson, John Wozniak
Defensive Coordinator: David Duggan
Hattiesburg, MS • M.M. Roberts Stadium (36,000)

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	3	at Kentucky
Sept.	10	Savannah State
Sept.	17	Troy
Sept.	24	at UTEP
Oct.	1	Rice
Oct.	8	at UTSA
Oct.	15	at LSU
Oct.	29	Marshall
Nov.	5	Charlotte
Nov.	12	at Old Dominion
Nov.	19	at North Texas
Nov.	26	Louisiana Tech

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: 9-5, 7-1

Sept.	5	Mississippi State	L	16-34
Sept.	12	Austin Peay	W	52-6
Sept.	19	at Texas State	W	56-50
Sept.	26	at Nebraska	L	28-36
Oct.	3	North Texas	W	49-14
Oct.	9	at Marshall	L	10-31
Oct.	17	UTSA	W	32-10
Oct.	24	at Charlotte	W	44-10
Oct.	31	UTEP	W	34-13
Nov.	14	at Rice	W	65-10
Nov.	21	Old Dominion	W	56-31
Nov.	28	at Louisiana Tech	W	58-24
Dec.	5	at Western Kentucky %	L	28-45
Dec.	26	vs. Washington #	L	31-44

%C-USA Championship #Heart Of Dallas Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS

1. JaCorey Morris, LB, Grove Hill, AL
2. Keon Howard, QB, Laurel, MS
3. Racheem Booth, LB, Bassfield, MS
4. Jacob Johnson, OL, Spanish Fort, AL
5. Jacques Turner, DE, D'Iberville, MS
6. Kwadra Griggs, QB, Greenwood, MS*
7. Isaiah Jones, WR, Milton, FL*
8. Demetrius Market, CB, Batesville, MS
9. Lorenzo Dantzler, DE, Starkville, MS
10. Terrance Watkins, WR, Athens, AL

*junior college transfer

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	C-USA	NATIONAL
Scoring	39.9 ppg	2	13
Rushing	179.8 ypg	1	54
Passing	329.7 ypg	2	12
Total	509.5 ypg	2	12
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**C-USA**	**NATIONAL**
Scoring	25.6 ppg	2	49
Rushing	151.9 ypg	2	46
Passing	227.6 ypg	3	70
Total	379.5 ypg	3	50
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**C-USA**	**NATIONAL**
-1	-0.07	5	74

OFFENSE By pretty much any measure, 2015 was the most prolific offensive season in Southern Miss history. The Golden Eagles set school records for yards and points per game, as well as yards per play. Junior Nick Mullens attempted more passes for more yards, more touchdowns and a higher efficiency rating than any USM quarterback before him. Two different backs (Jalen Richard and Ito Smith) eclipsed 1,000 yards on the ground, another first. There were single-season marks set for receptions (Casey Martin, 80) and receiving yards (Mike Thomas, 1,391), and Thomas added the record for receiving TDs (14).

That's a tough act to follow, particularly after the architects of the breakthrough, head coach Todd Monken and offensive coordinator Chip Lindsey, both left for greener pastures. Thomas, Martin, and Richard all graduated, along with both starting tackles. But the 2016 offense is hardly starting from scratch: Mullens will be back to complete his assault on the school record book as a senior. Smith will take on the lion's share of the ground game as a junior, running behind a long-in-the-tooth interior line led by All-C-USA center Cameron Tom. Senior D.J. Thompson has the look of the next big thing at receiver, unless he's supplanted by sophomore Korey Robertson or junior college transfer Isaiah Jones.

Some regression under the new coaching staff may be inevitable. But the scheme under new coordinator Shannon Dawson will remain largely the same — Dawson, like Monken, is steeped in the Air Raid philosophy.

DEFENSE The offense was so good that it tended to overshadow the equally dramatic improvement on defense. Southern Miss led C-USA in yards allowed in conference games and ranked second in points allowed. Many of the headliners from that unit are back, including the leading tackler, senior D'Nerius Antoine, who experimented at linebacker in the spring after a stellar turn in 2015 at free safety; the top pass rusher, senior Dylan Bradley; and a pair of veteran stalwarts in the secondary, juniors Cornell Armstrong and Picasso Nelson Jr., who combined for 38 starts in their first two years on campus.

Southern Miss lost both of last year's starting defensive tackles, Michael Smith and Andrew Bolton, as well as middle linebacker Brian Anderson, who led the team with 13.5 tackles for a loss. The Eagles held eight of nine C-USA opponents below their season average for rushing yards, a streak the new bodies in the middle (Draper Riley and LaDarius Harris on the line, Jeremy Sangster at linebacker) will be hard-pressed to repeat.

SPECIALISTS The kicking game was an adventure, beginning with placekicker Stephen Brauchle, who missed four PATs and his only field goal attempt beyond 40 yards. The punt team didn't fare much better: Tyler Sarrazin forced just one fair catch on 45 attempts and posted a net average of just 34.5 yards. The Eagles will also be in the market for a new punt returner to replace Richard and Martin, neither of whom brought much juice to the role.

FINAL ANALYSIS Last year's run to the C-USA Championship Game felt like a return to normal after the Eagles lost 33 of 36 games over the previous three seasons. Monken's successor, Jay Hopson, doesn't offer much in the way of name recognition, but he has much closer ties to the school and the state, having played at Ole Miss, served two separate stints as a Southern Miss assistant, and most recently resuscitated the fortunes of Alcorn State.

He inherits Conference USA's most accomplished quarterback and arguably its most talented roster, top to bottom. Aside from a midseason trip to LSU, every game on the schedule is winnable, including an Week 1 test at Kentucky.

NICK MULLENS

"They're going to be good, but I'd downgrade them a little bit just based on the coaching change. There will be a learning curve."
— An opposing C-USA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	5	**D.J. Thompson (Sr.)**	88	Isaiah Jones (Jr.)
WR	18	Korey Robertson (So.)	86	Shannon Smith (Jr.)
WR	6	Marquise Ricard (Jr.)	15	Allenzae Staggers (Jr.)
LT	76	Ty Pollard (Fr.)	52	Tyler Stutzman (Jr.)
LG	68	**Brandon Farmer (Sr.)**	75	Oliver Bates (Sr.)
C	70	**Cameron Tom (Sr.)**	65	Brian Long (So.)
RG	78	**Devin Farrior (Jr.)**	74	Jerry Harris (Jr.)
RT	77	Jacob Fleming (Sr.)	79	Drake Dorbeck (Fr.)
TE	42	Taylor Marini (Jr.)	89	Ricky Parks (Sr.)
QB	9	**Nick Mullens (Sr.)**	7	Kwadra Griggs (Jr.)
RB	25	**Ito Smith (Jr.)**	20	Patrick Brooks (Fr.)

DEFENSE (6)

DE	94	**Dylan Bradley (Sr.)**	92	Naim Mustafaa (Jr.)
DT	98	Draper Riley (Jr.)	90	Rod Crayton (Jr.)
DT	43	LaDarius Harris (So.)	97	Christopher Robinson (Jr.)
DE	22	**Darian Yancey (So.)**	85	Ja'Boree Poole (Sr.)
OLB	12	**D'Nerius Antoine (Sr.)**		JaCorey Morris (Fr.)
MLB	26	Jeremy Sangster (So.)	30	Paxton Schrimsher (Fr.)
OLB	17	**Elijah Parker (Sr.)**	37	Sherrod Ruff (Jr.)
CB	3	**Cornell Armstrong (Jr.)**	14	Demetrius Market (Fr.)
CB	2	Trae Collins (Jr.)	19	Curtis Mikell (Jr.)
SS	15	Devonta Foster (Sr.)	13	**Picasso Nelson Jr. (Jr.)**
FS	8	Deshadrick Truly (Sr.)	6	Kelsey Douglas (Sr.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	28	Stephen Brauchle (Sr.)	KR	25 Ito Smith (Jr.)
P	82	Tyler Sarrazin (Sr.)	PR	13 Picasso Nelson Jr. (Jr.)

BOLD indicates returning starter

RETURNING LEADERS

Passing: Nick Mullens, 521-331-4,476-12, 38 TDs
Rushing: Ito Smith, 171 att., 1,128 yds., 10 TDs
Receiving: D.J. Thompson, 55 rec., 779 yds., 6 TDs
Tackles: D'Nerius Antoine, 103
Sacks: Dylan Bradley, 6.5
Interceptions: Cornell Armstrong, 2; D'Nerius Antoine, 2

STAT CORNER

8.0

Southern Miss averaged 8.0 yards per play in November, second in FBS. The Eagles peaked late and stole the C-USA West title.

Southern Miss Athletics

WKU HILLTOPPERS

NATIONAL FORECAST: 76 • **C-USA EAST PREDICTION:** 3 • **PROJECTED RECORD:** 8-4, 6-2 C-USA

TEAM INFORMATION

Head Coach: Jeff Brohm
Record at School: 20-7 (2 years)
Career Record: 20-7 (2 years)
Offensive Coordinator: Jeff Brohm
Defensive Coordinator: Nick Holt
Bowling Green, KY • Houchens Industries-L.T. Smith Stadium (22,113)

2016 SCHEDULE

Sept.	3	Rice
Sept.	10	at Alabama
Sept.	17	at Miami (Ohio)
Sept.	24	Vanderbilt
Oct.	1	Houston Baptist
Oct.	8	at Louisiana Tech
Oct.	15	at Middle Tennessee
Oct.	22	Old Dominion
Oct.	29	at Florida Atlantic
Nov.	5	FIU
Nov.	12	North Texas
Nov.	26	at Marshall

2015 RESULTS

FINAL RECORD: 12-2, 8-0

Sept.	3	at Vanderbilt	W	14-12
Sept.	10	Louisiana Tech	W	41-38
Sept.	19	at Indiana	L	35-38
Sept.	26	Miami (Ohio)	W	56-14
Oct.	3	at Rice	W	49-10
Oct.	10	Middle Tennessee	W	58-28
Oct.	15	at North Texas	W	55-28
Oct.	24	at LSU	L	20-45
Oct.	31	at Old Dominion	W	55-30
Nov.	7	Florida Atlantic	W	35-19
Nov.	21	at FIU	W	63-7
Nov.	27	Marshall	W	49-28
Dec.	5	Southern Miss %	W	45-28
Dec.	21	vs. South Florida #	W	45-35

%C-USA Championship #Miami Beach Bowl

TOP 10 RECRUITS

1. Quinton Baker, RB, Ashland, KY
2. Jeremy Darvin, DT, Nashville, TN
3. Xavier Lane, WR, Montgomery, AL
4. Chris Cotto, WR, Hallandale, FL
5. Dee Cain, LB, Princeton, KY
6. Tyler Witt, OL, Joliet, IL
7. Jahcour Pearson, WR, Hollywood, FL
8. Jalen Madden, DT, Tuscaloosa, AL
9. Steven Duncan, QB, Summerville, SC
10. Seth Joest, OL, Versailles, KY

2015 RANKINGS

OFFENSE	PER GAME	C-USA	NATIONAL
Scoring	44.3 ppg	1	3
Rushing	154.1 ypg	9	90
Passing	372.2 ypg	1	4
Total	526.4 ypg	1	9
DEFENSE	**PER GAME**	**C-USA**	**NATIONAL**
Scoring	25.9 ppg	3	53
Rushing	165.6 ypg	5	59
Passing	239.6 ypg	7	86
Total	405.2 ypg	5	72
TO MARGIN	**PER GAME**	**C-USA**	**NATIONAL**
+14	+1.00	1	4

OFFENSE Western Kentucky has the unenviable task of replacing star quarterback Brandon Doughty. The six-year veteran rewrote the Hilltopper record book, throwing for 97 touchdowns and nearly 10,000 yards over his final two seasons. WKU had four candidates competing for the job in the spring and will add another freshman in fall camp. The spring didn't present a clear starter, although senior Nelson Fishback and junior Mike White appeared to be the frontrunners.

Fishback brings the benefit of having been in coach Jeff Brohm's system longer, but White — a transfer from South Florida who sat out at WKU last year — might bring the best physical talents. The job won't be decided until the fall.

The good news for the quarterbacks is that they'll have a veteran nucleus around them. The Hilltoppers return their top eight offensive linemen, including star left tackle Forrest Lamp. That front line tied for 14th in the nation last year in sacks allowed per game. The top two running backs — sophomore D'Andre Ferby and senior Anthony Wales — return after combining for 20 touchdowns and more than 1,700 rushing yards last year.

WKU lost two of its top outside receiving threats, but its top target, senior standout Taywan Taylor, is back after his assault on the school's receiving records last year. Taylor emerged as one of the most productive wideouts in the country despite starting only five games and briefly tested the NFL waters before deciding to return to school. WKU relies heavily on the tight end and must find a new option to replace star Tyler Higbee. All that adds up to some questions in Brohm's explosive passing game, but the group has veteran leadership to lean on until it truly finds its way.

DEFENSE WKU's defense improved last season from one of the nation's worst units in 2014 to a more than capable group in 2015. The Hilltoppers lose seven starters from last year's defense, but they're not exactly devoid of experience. Those who've played before will be asked to take on larger roles, most notably at cornerback. The Hilltoppers must replace both starters, with juniors Joe Brown and De'Andre Simmons the most likely candidates.

WKU must replace three starters on the defensive line to go with returning junior defensive end Derik Overstreet. Senior tackle Omarius Bryant (6'3", 310 pounds) gives them a massive option in the middle, and senior Nick Dawson-Brents — a transfer from Louisville — provides more experience on the outside.

The linebackers should be the strength of the unit. The team's leading tackler, junior T.J. McCollum, is back at outside linebacker. Senior Keith Brown, another transfer from Louisville, moves from a part-time starting role with the Cardinals to WKU's middle linebacker position.

SPECIALISTS The kicking game is one of WKU's biggest questions after graduating Garrett Schwettman, the school's all-time leading scorer. Sophomore Jake Collins could be a candidate to handle both the field goal and punting duties. Junior receiver Kylen Towner has been WKU's go-to return man since his freshman year. He tallied a 98-yard kickoff return TD last season.

FINAL ANALYSIS WKU is not likely to be the explosive bunch that posted video game-type numbers last season on its way to a 12–2 record, a Conference USA championship and a Miami Beach Bowl win. But that doesn't mean the Hilltoppers won't be in contention for another league title and a bowl berth. They may have to lean on their defense early until the offense finds its identity, but an experienced offensive line and many skill pieces should give the eventual starting quarterback plenty to work with in Brohm's creative system.

ANTHONY WALES

"They obviously have a huge hole to fill with [Brandon] Doughty finally being gone. It feels like that guy was in my life forever."
— An opposing C-USA assistant coach

DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE (6)

WR	2	Taywan Taylor (Sr.)	11 Lucky Jackson (Fr.)
WR	1	Nacarius Fant (Jr.)	16 Quin Jernighan (Fr.)
WR	15	**Nicholas Norris (Sr.)**	81 Kylen Towner (Jr.)
LT	76	**Forrest Lamp (Sr.)**	75 Jimmie Sims (Jr.)
LG	51	**Brandon Ray (Jr.)**	77 Hunter Holland (Fr.)
C	70	**Max Halpin (Sr.)**	64 Dennis Edwards (So.)
RG	64	**Dennis Edwards (So.)**	79 Joe Manley (Sr.)
RT	62	**Darrell Williams (Sr.)**	69 Matt Nord (Jr.)
TE	18	Shaq Johnson (Sr.)	89 Desmond Maxwell (Sr.)
QB	14	Mike White (Jr.)	9 Nelson Fishback (Sr.)
RB	20	Anthony Wales (Sr.)	32 D'Andre Ferby (So.)

DEFENSE (4)

DE	72	**Derik Overstreet (Jr.)**	24 Devante Duclos (Sr.)
DT	9	Omarius Bryant (Sr.)	55 Evan Sayner (So.)
DT	3	Chris Johnson (Jr.)	96 Julien Lewis (So.)
DE	94	Nick Dawson-Brents (Sr.)	11 Tanner Reeves (Jr.)
OLB	6	**T.J. McCollum (Jr.)**	34 Drew Davis (Sr.)
ILB	1	Keith Brown (Sr.)	54 Daeshawn Bertram (Jr.)
OLB	4	Joel Iyiegbuniwe (So.)	25 Masai Whyte (So.)
CB	7	Joe Brown (Jr.)	21 Jordon Gonzalez (Fr.)
CB	23	De'Andre Simmons (Jr.)	18 A.J. Jackson (Fr.)
SS	8	**Marcus Ward (Sr.)**	29 Leverick Johnson (Jr.)
FS	31	**Branden Leston (Sr.)**	27 Martavius Mims (So.)

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	49	Jake Collins (So.)	KR	81	Kylen Towner (Jr.)
P	49	Jake Collins (So.)	PR	1	Nacarius Fant (Jr.)

BOLD indicates returning starter

RETURNING LEADERS

Passing: Nelson Fishback, 8-7-70-0, 0 TDs
Rushing: Anthony Wales, 155 att., 1,091 yds., 9 TDs
Receiving: Taywan Taylor, 86 rec., 1,467 yds., 17 TDs
Tackles: T.J. McCollum, 106
Sacks: T.J. McCollum, 3.0
Interceptions: Seven players tied with 1

STAT CORNER

+2.6

WKU averaged 7.5 yards per play on first down (second in FBS) and allowed 4.9 (17th). The plus-2.6 margin was second in FBS.

Brandon Carter | WKU Athletics

QB RANKINGS

Quarterback is the most important position in football — arguably, it's the most important position in sports. Just for fun, we took on the difficult task of ranking all 128 starting quarterbacks in the FBS ranks. We considered several factors, including 2015 statistics, projections for 2016, value to the team, recruiting profile and overall talent. Note: This ranking might differ slightly from the quarterback unit rankings found elsewhere in the magazine. Those factor a team's entire quarterback situation, not just the starter.

DESHAUN WATSON

JOSHUA DOBBS

BRENT STOCKSTILL

1. **DESHAUN WATSON,** Clemson
2. **BAKER MAYFIELD,** Oklahoma
3. **J.T. BARRETT,** Ohio State
4. **GREG WARD,** Houston
5. **CHAD KELLY,** Ole Miss
6. **PATRICK MAHOMES,** Texas Tech
7. **SETH RUSSELL,** Baylor
8. **BRAD KAAYA,** Miami
9. **JOSH ROSEN,** UCLA
10. **LUKE FALK,** Washington State
11. **DESHONE KIZER,** Notre Dame
12. **JOSHUA DOBBS,** Tennessee
13. **MASON RUDOLPH,** Oklahoma State
14. **C.J. BEATHARD,** Iowa
15. **JAKE BROWNING,** Washington
16. **LAMAR JACKSON,** Louisville
17. **NICK MULLENS,** Southern Miss
18. **BRENT STOCKSTILL,** MTSU
19. **QUINTON FLOWERS,** USF
20. **BRETT RYPIEN,** Boise State
21. **MITCH TRUBISKY,** North Carolina
22. **TANNER MANGUM,** BYU
23. **TAYLOR LAMB,** Appalachian State
24. **ZACH TERRELL,** Western Michigan
25. **COOPER RUSH,** Central Michigan
26. **GUNNER KIEL,** Cincinnati
27. **DAKOTA PRUKOP,** Oregon
28. **KENNY HILL,** TCU
29. **ANU SOLOMON,** Arizona
30. **BRANDON HARRIS,** LSU
31. **JACOB EASON,** Georgia
32. **MAX BROWNE,** USC
33. **JUSTIN THOMAS,** Georgia Tech
34. **DEONDRE FRANCOIS,** Florida State
35. **COOPER BATEMAN,** Alabama
36. **TOMMY ARMSTRONG,** Nebraska
37. **DANE EVANS,** Tulsa
38. **TREVOR KNIGHT,** Texas A&M
39. **WES LUNT,** Illinois
40. **P.J. WALKER,** Temple
41. **THOMAS SIRK,** Duke
42. **KEVIN ELLISON,** Georgia Southern
43. **SKYLER HOWARD,** West Virginia
44. **SEFO LIUFAU,** Colorado
45. **NATHAN PETERMAN,** Pittsburgh
46. **PATRICK TOWLES,** Boston College
47. **MITCH LEIDNER,** Minnesota
48. **JOHN O'KORN,** Michigan
49. **DREW HARE,** Northern Illinois
50. **KENT MYERS,** Utah State
51. **NICK STEVENS,** Colorado State
52. **KENNY POTTER,** San Jose State
53. **CLAYTON THORSON,** Northwestern
54. **CHASE LITTON,** Marshall
55. **KELLER CHRYST,** Stanford
56. **ERIC DUNGEY,** Syracuse
57. **JUSTIN HOLMAN,** UCF
58. **TYLER O'CONNOR,** Michigan State
59. **JEROD EVANS,** Virginia Tech
60. **BRANDON SILVERS,** Troy
61. **JOHN WOLFORD,** Wake Forest
62. **MATT JOHNS,** Virginia
63. **ALEX MCGOUGH,** FIU
64. **MIKE WHITE,** WKU
65. **TRACE MCSORLEY,** Penn State
66. **AUSTIN ALLEN,** Arkansas
67. **LUKE DEL RIO,** Florida
68. **DREW BARKER,** Kentucky
69. **THOMAS WOODSON,** Akron
70. **GARRETT SMITH,** ULM
71. **TYLER JONES,** Texas State
72. **LOGAN WOODSIDE,** Toledo
73. **JOEL LANNING,** Iowa State
74. **DARELL GARRETSON,** Oregon State
75. **MATT DAVIS,** SMU
76. **TYLER STEWART,** Nevada
77. **JALAN MCCLENDON,** NC State
78. **NICK FITZGERALD,** Mississippi State
79. **LAMAR JORDAN,** New Mexico
80. **CHASE FORREST,** California
81. **SHANE BUECHELE,** Texas
82. **BRYANT SHIRREFFS,** UConn
83. **MATT LINEHAN,** Idaho
84. **JAMES KNAPKE,** Bowling Green
85. **RILEY NEAL,** Ball State
86. **TAGO SMITH,** Navy
87. **BRANDON MCILWAIN,** South Carolina
88. **JOHN FRANKLIN III,** Auburn
89. **KYLE SHURMUR,** Vanderbilt
90. **DREW LOCK,** Missouri
91. **DAVID BLOUGH,** Purdue
92. **PHILIP NELSON,** East Carolina
93. **DAVID WASHINGTON,** Old Dominion
94. **RILEY FERGUSON,** Memphis
95. **BART HOUSTON,** Wisconsin
96. **MANNY WILKINS,** Arizona State
97. **RYAN WILLIS,** Kansas
98. **BROGAN ROBACK,** Eastern Michigan
99. **NATE ROMINE,** Air Force
100. **J.D. SPRAGUE,** Ohio
101. **TROY WILLIAMS,** Utah
102. **RICHARD LAGOW,** Indiana
103. **CHRISTIAN CHAPMAN,** San Diego State
104. **CHRIS LAVIANO,** Rutgers
105. **JESSE ERTZ,** Kansas State
106. **JARED JOHNSON,** UTSA
107. **ALEC MORRIS,** North Texas
108. **JASON DRISKEL,** FAU
109. **PERRY HILLS,** Maryland
110. **JUSTICE HANSEN,** Arkansas State
111. **RYAN HIGGINS,** Louisiana Tech
112. **RYAN METZ,** UTEP
113. **AHMAD BRADSHAW,** Army
114. **TYLER ROGERS,** New Mexico State
115. **JORDAN DAVIS,** UL Lafayette
116. **JOHNNY STANTON,** UNLV
117. **BILLY BAHL,** Miami (Ohio)
118. **CHASON VIRGIL,** Fresno State
119. **TYREE JACKSON,** Buffalo
120. **IKAIKA WOOLSEY,** Hawaii
121. **JOSH ALLEN,** Wyoming
122. **ANDREW FORD,** UMass
123. **DALLAS DAVIS,** South Alabama
124. **TYLER STEHLING,** Rice
125. **EMIERE SCAIFE,** Georgia State
126. **GEORGE BOLLAS,** Kent State
127. **BROOKS BARDEN,** Charlotte
128. **DARIUS BRADWELL,** Tulane

Watson: Tom DiPace; Dobbs: Patrick Murphy-Racey; Stockstill: MTSU Athletics

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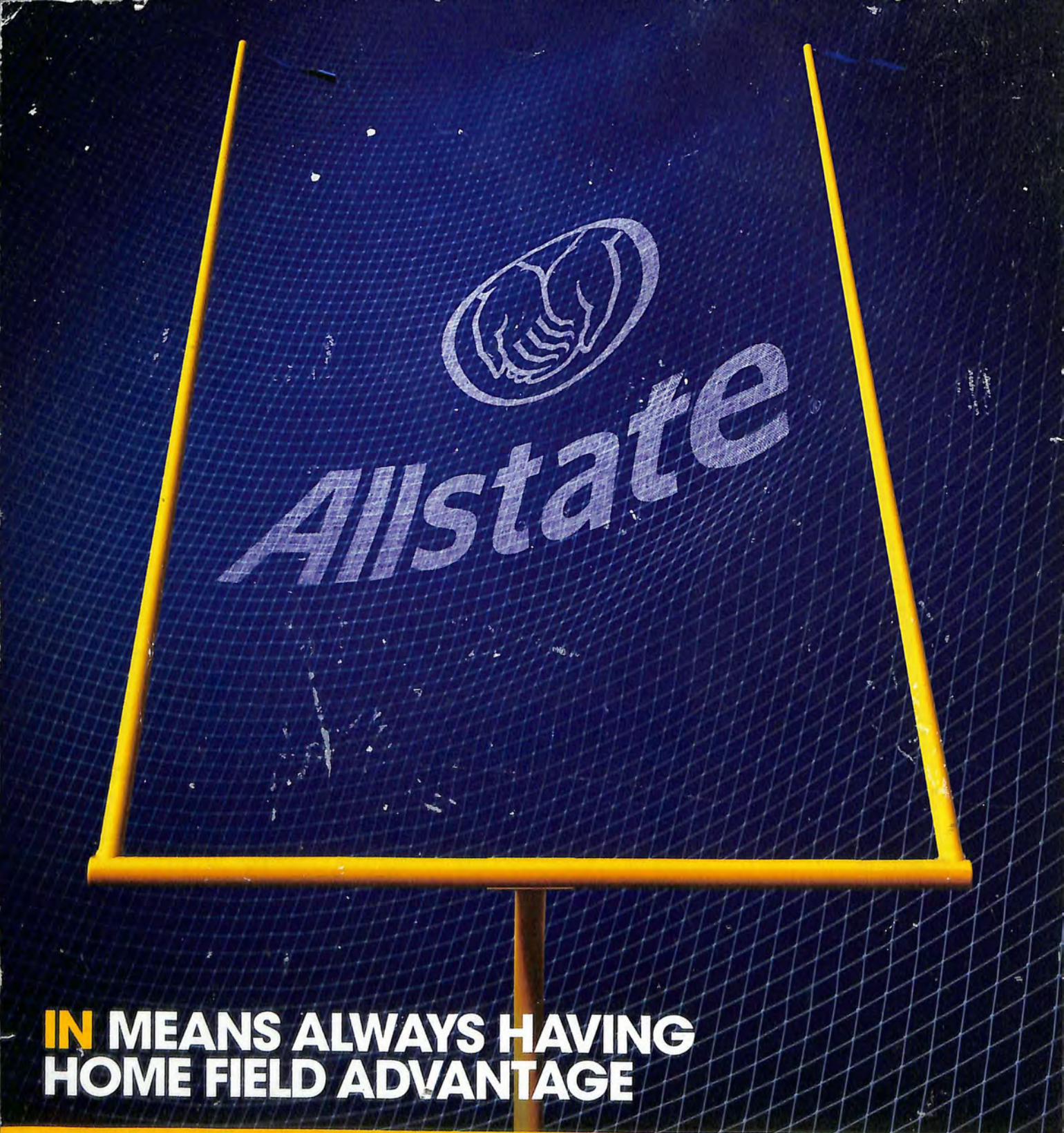

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